

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1640.—VOL. LXIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 6, 1894.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



GLADYS RUSHED FORWARD AS IF TO THROW HERSELF INTO JIM'S OUTSTRETCHED ARMS.

AN OLD BACHELOR'S BLUNDER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"Well, Gladys, darling, this is our last evening together, I suppose," said Jim Beaufort with a deep sigh, as he and Gladys Morant strolled together through the fields around Ivy Cottage, "two days hence and I shall be with the regiment on board the *Himalaya*, on my way to Bombay! It will be a long, a very long time before I see you again!"

"Yes, Jim, I know," returned Gladys very sadly, looking up into his dark, handsome young face with tear-filled eyes and quivering lips.

"How I wish I could take you with me, dear," he continued, "it—it is like death parting with you, but I can't, it's impossible, I am so poor. Sometimes I think that it has been selfish of me to bind you—to ask you to wait for me to pass, perhaps all your youth waiting—I ought to have gone away without saying a word."

"And left me miserable!" said the girl, reproachfully.

"Then you aren't sorry I spoke—you are content to wait—you don't think I have been wrong?" said Jim, eagerly.

"Wrong! No! Oh, Jim, if you only knew how those few words of yours changed my whole life and filled it with joy! I would wait willingly for you till I am thirty, if need be!"

And to Gladys who was but eighteen, thirty seemed a great age, and the day when she would have to acknowledge to it a long, long way off!

"Darling!" he said, "how good you are. I trust you implicitly, Gladys; but I'm afraid that you'll have a hard time of it when I am gone—they'll try and make you give me up—I don't mean that—that your father will—but—but—"

"Mamma!—I know," replied Gladys, slowly.

"Yes, your mother does not approve of our engagement, and indeed," he added, ruefully, "I cannot blame her, it is a poor match for you, Gladys, it's been a sad disappointment to her, no doubt, and she dislikes me cordially in consequence. Of course she'd have preferred you to marry Sir Garnet Waterford."

"Papa would never have wished that, Jim, I know," put in Gladys, quickly.

"No, Captain Morant would never wish it, he knows—understands the man, better than your mother does, or possibly could, he would not like to see you his wife; and, moreover, he is fond of me. You won't let them part us when I am gone, will you, Gladys?"

"No," she replied, softly. "Don't imagine they will even try, Jim. I'm sure father would never wish me to break my word to you, dear."

"No, not your father; it is a great comfort to me to know your father is on my side, Gladys. Oh! if I were only rich enough to take you away with me now. And such a very little money, or what many people consider so very little, would be enough to enable me to do it."

"Yes," sighed Gladys, "but we haven't got it, we must wait, I suppose; besides, I don't believe mother could spare me just now—"

"Not to me; but she'd find no difficulty in sparing you to Sir Garnet," said the young man, bitterly. "It seems a shame a fellow like that, who lives for nothing but gambling and racing, should have thousands at his command to squander, whilst we have hardly sufficient for our

bare needs, so that I have to leave you behind me—both our hearts—because I have not enough to support you; it makes a fellow wild to think of it!”

“Then don’t think of it, dear Jim,” rejoined Gladys, gravely, “it only makes matters worse. When you have got your company or an appointment—”

“When! Yes,” groaned Jim, “years hence, perhaps!”

“But the time will pass, Jim, dear. How quickly it goes, even in this quiet little village; and to you abroad it will simply fly. You must write to me every mail, and I will write to you, and then we shall not feel so cut off from each other; try and bear up and to look on the best side of things, dear.”

“Ah! I wish I had your cheerful, placid, temperament, Gladys,” he said, stooping and kissing her soft cheek. “You are so good and patient. I don’t know how they’ll get on without you when I do carry you off.”

“Oh! they won’t want me then; the girls will be grown up, be married, perhaps, and the boys out in the world, and father, I hope and trust quite well and strong again,” she replied, cheerfully. “Tell me, Jim,” she added more anxiously, “how do you think he is looking? I sometimes feel very uneasy about him.”

“I think he seems better, rather,” replied Jim, “he is certainly stronger. Would—would your mother be very badly off if—”

“We should be next door to beggars, Jim, I believe—or so mamma says,” replied Gladys, “we have no relations to help us, and no friends who could do anything for us. Mamma says she and father married on nothing and have been paupers all their lives in consequence, and that if—if she were left a widow we should be awfully poor—too poor to remain here—to keep up this little, wee place. I don’t know what would become of us all, Jim,” and her voice was full of anxiety as she spoke.

“Well! we won’t look forward to such a catastrophe,” replied Jim; but his heart sank as he spoke, and remembered how wan, and worn, and listless Captain Morant had appeared that day as he talked to him in the little room he called his own, where most of his time was spent now. It was terrible to have to leave Gladys with the prospect of utter poverty before her, should his illness terminate, as it was only too likely it might.

“You will never let them persuade you to marry Sir Garnet—promise me that—not under any circumstances,” he said suddenly, after a pause, in an agitated voice.

“I promise you, Jim, why do you talk as if—as if—oh! darling, don’t you know I love you!”

And tears filled her dark, violet eyes as she looked up hurt and surprised, into his face.

“I know it—I know it,” he replied, kissing her passionately, “I know you love me; but—if you saw your mother, your brothers and sisters in want—and—but there, I’ll not think of it any more. Let us be happy, whilst we are together, at any rate.”

But, somehow, his words had thoroughly damped Gladys’ spirits: her heart felt heavy, her bosom was filled with misgivings, and she did not completely recover her usual cheerfulness during the remainder of the walk.

“It’s getting late—its past eight o’clock; we must be going in,” she said at last in a low, sad voice, her heart aching as she looked at her lover and felt that it would be many, many months before they wandered through the sweet lanes and fields around Matcham again.

“One minute,” he said, as he paused on a grassy mound, beneath a clump of wide-spreading beech-trees, and looked wistfully around. “How often I shall think of this scene—of this evening, Gladys, when I am far away! How peaceful and calm it all is! Listen to the rushing of the mill-stream in the valley, and the cooing of the stock-doves in the coppice there! How the wind sighs and whispers through the pine branches in the woods yonder! Whenever you come this way, Gladys, and look at the scene from here, think of me, darling.”

“Yes; but oh, Jim! don’t—don’t speak in that tone or—my heart will break,” she cried.

And in another moment she was sobbing on his breast. He soothed her as best he could, and after a while, hand-in-hand they resumed their walk and hastened back to the cottage. It was a long, low, roomy building with a thatched roof and quaint dormer windows, and with ivy growing thickly on the walls and over the porch. It stood in the midst of an old-fashioned garden, brilliant with summer flowers, and was backed by a belt of firs and beeches. At the open window of the drawing-room, stood a tall, handsome, grey-haired lady, dressed in black, who was evidently waiting for the young people.

“You are very late, Gladys,” she said, coldly and reprovingly, “the children have had their supper and have gone to bed, but you will find your father in the dining-room still.”

“Oh, mamma, I am sorry,” said Gladys, falteringly; “but—but this is Jim’s last evening, you know.”

“Yes, I know that, and therefore, you should not keep him out so long,” she returned; “at what time do you start to-morrow, Mr. Beaufort?”

“At ten o’clock, Mrs. Morant,” he answered.

“How is Captain Morant, this evening?”

“Very poorly,” she replied; “it is sad to see a man of his age, who should be hale and hearty, so pulled down. It is the life of daily worry and anxiety he leads, far more than the hardships he has had to go through and which are inevitable in the life of a soldier, that has told on him, poor fellow. Worry kills more people than disease does, and he is one of its victims.”

She turned away with a heavy sigh as she spoke, and entered the drawing-room. Gladys and her lover followed her and passed on into the dining-room.

“It ought to be a warning to her,” muttered Mrs. Morant, as she looked after her child, “but, girls, when they fancy themselves in love will see nothing. I was just the same at her age, so I ought not to blame her, or to be surprised, perhaps. She thinks love is everything—that suffering, and privation, and disappointment will not be felt if shared with her lover. Well! it isn’t for oneself one cares so much, but for one’s children! I could have borne poverty, if it hadn’t been for my children! but to see the boys at a second-rate school with no advantages, no prospects before them, and the girls growing up almost without an education at all, and with no chances of settling in life (Gladys, the prettiest of them, willing to throw herself away on a pauper like poor James Beaufort, too) that is hard to bear indeed! One feels that. And to think how well she might have married, if Winslow had not set himself against the match, and Jim Beaufort had not appeared on the scene. It’s all very well to say Sir Garnet was wild, all men sow their wild oats—with a wife like Gladys he would have settled down quietly.”

And Mrs. Morant thought regretfully of the Waterford Estates, the Hall and its beautiful surroundings, and felt bitter and angry with both her husband and her daughter.

Gladys might have been Lady Waterford and the mistress of it all, and their troubles and trials might have been over, if she had only so willed it, and her father had encouraged her to accept, instead of to reject her wealthy suitor.

She had given a very reluctant consent to her daughter’s foolish engagement, as she termed it, and though she tolerated James Beaufort’s presence and did not forbid his visits to the house, she did not scruple to let him see that they were unwelcome to her, nor to talk to Gladys about her silly love affair in a scornful, slighting way that wounded her deeply, treating it as a mere passing folly—a thing that would soon be forgotten, and which it was almost impossible would end in marriage.

“They will both be thoroughly tired of it before three years are over,” she thought. “When James Beaufort is once out of the way, I think I may be able to make Gladys listen to reason. Three years! Who can say what may happen—where we may all be in three years!”

And Mrs. Morant shuddered and hid her face in her white shapely hands.

She felt that her husband’s state was serious,

and knew that at his death she would be next door to penniless, she and her children.

And Gladys, if she had only done what her mother wished, might have saved them all from such an awful prospect!

Meanwhile, Gladys and her lover had bade each other good-night.

Captain Morant, a small, pale, anxious-looking man, had shaken hands with Jim and bade him good-bye, and they had parted, only to meet again for a few minutes next morning, when Jim would call at the Cottage on his way to the station from whence he was to start for London.

It was soon over; by ten o’clock next day the young couple had bade each other farewell, and Gladys, feeling utterly desolate and heart-broken, realised at last that life would indeed be hard and dreary without Jim’s daily presence.

“Poor dear child, it reminds me of our early days, Adelaide,” said Captain Morant, sadly, “go and comfort her, my dear.”

“She will be better left alone for the present, Winslow,” replied Mrs. Morant. “It is very sad for her—very—I am sure I wish Jim Beaufort had never crossed her path.”

“Don’t say that my dear Adelaide,” remonstrated the invalid. “I’m sure Jim is a fine young fellow enough—very like his father was at his age, and a better fellow and a more smart officer never lived. I remember at Malta once the General saying—”

“Yes, yes, my dear Winslow,” put in Mrs. Morant, impatiently. She had heard the story of what the General said of Jim Beaufort’s father several times before, and was in a state of too great nervous irritation and anxiety to listen to it again patiently. “I know all that. I have no objection to James Beaufort personally—he is a good enough young fellow, I dare say, but he has no money, my dear; he can’t afford to marry.”

“We had little more when we married,” said Captain Morant.

Mrs. Morant sighed.

“The children have had to suffer,” she said in a low voice, “I would guard Gladys from having to suffer what we have had to suffer, Winslow, for them.”

The Captain sighed and looked deprecatingly at his wife. She met and understood his glance. She went up to his side and kissed him at once.

“I have never regretted it for myself, Winslow, as you know,” she said, “only for them.”

“Four girls! yes, four girls are a responsibility—the boys can shift for themselves. They are all good-looking though—Adelaide, they take after you, my dear,” he replied, “they will marry.”

And very pretty girls their four daughters were, from Gladys, with her violet eyes, golden-brown hair and regular features, to laughing little Violet—a small, fair, delicate child of twelve, to say nothing of Alice, a pretty brunette, with a rich dark complexion and velvety black eyes, and Fanny, who though now at the “awkward age,” as it is called, gave promise of great good looks in time to come.

“One can never be sure of girls marrying now-a-days, however pretty they may be,” said Mrs. Morant, “and they generally follow in each others’ footsteps if they do—that is why I had so hoped Gladys would have made a good match, Winslow.”

And she sighed deeply.

CHAPTER II.

SUMMER and autumn passed, and Gladys gradually fell back into the old way of living—helping her mother in the house—nursing her father and teaching her three sisters—Fanny, Alice, and Violet—what little she knew herself. A hard, dull, cheerless life enough for a young girl.

But Jim’s letters, which reached her regularly, were her comfort; she lived on them—read them over and over, and employed much of her spare time in writing replies to them, an occupation that gave her the keenest delight.

Towards the beginning of the year, soon after Dick and Oliver, her two brothers had returned

to school, the Christmas holidays being over, Captain Morant's illness took a turn, and he grew suddenly worse.

"We must send for Dr. Howard at once, Gladys," said Mrs. Morant, hurrying into the dining-room where the girls were sitting one afternoon, busy with their books. "Who can go quickest?"

"I can," cried Fanny, a tall girl of about fourteen, all arms and legs as her sisters told her, "I can run over to Filey in ten minutes. I run faster than—"

"Run off then," interrupted Mrs. Morant, whose face was pale and agitated, "run off, and ask Dr. Howard to come over at once, say your father is very ill—much worse, Fanny—make him come over with you."

Fanny with a frightened face started up, and in a couple of minutes was racing down the village, heedless of snow and ice, and ere ten minutes were over she stood panting at Dr. Howard's door.

The doctor's carriage was there, and he was on the point of going out, when he espied Fanny, and paused.

"Your father's worse, my dear," he said. "I'll come at once; jump into the carriage, Fanny, I'll drive you home. Dear! dear child! you should not come out so thinly clad. I shall have you on my hands next!"

And the old man pulled the flimsy cloth cloak Fanny wore more closely around her.

"Oh! it's all I've got for everyday wear, Dr. Howard," she laughed; "but I don't care about the cold. I'm as strong as a horse."

"Ah, it's best to be careful. Did you see your father before you left, Fanny?" he replied.

"No, father has not been down to-day," she replied. "Mother seemed frightened. She will be delighted to see us so soon, Dr. Howard."

"Thank Heaven you have come," was Mrs. Morant's greeting to the old man as she met him at the door of her husband's room. "He is very ill."

"Is he worse?" he asked.

"Much worse—those symptoms you warned me of, doctor," faltered Mrs. Morant. "Oh, for Heaven's sake save him. You don't know what it would mean to me—to us all to lose him!"

"I will do all I can, my dear lady, but I cannot work miracles," answered Dr. Howard, gravely, and passing her he went to Captain Morant's bedside.

The Captain's face was pale and drawn, and his breathing short and quick.

"The end of the journey, this time Howard," he said, quickly.

"Let us hope not yet," replied the doctor, trying to speak cheerfully, though his heart sank as he looked at his patient.

"Ah! I know it—the end has come at last! My poor wife my poor children, it is for them I grieve, Howard—for me, life has few charms—none apart from them. Heaven help them when I am gone," he continued, with a sob in his voice.

"Is it so bad as that?" asked Mr. Howard, sadly.

"Yes, ruin, nothing else—a pittance of a hundred and twenty pounds a year, doctor," he answered, whilst Dr. Howard sat down beside him, and felt his pulse, carefully.

"You have friends?" he began.

"Very few—and most are poor like me. I have written to one, a man who was once in my regiment, but left it and settled in Australia in the early days, and returned to England a few months ago with a fortune. We were great chums—I saved his life in India once, he wanted me to meet him next month in London, but we shall never meet now."

"You've written—you've told Mrs. Morant about him?" said the doctor, and his interest in the arrangements his patient had made for his family, plainly indicated, if nothing else did, his opinion of his state.

"Yes, she knows, poor Adelaide—if Gladys had married Sir Garnet."

Dr. Howard started.

"No, no; I never wished it," said Captain Morant, "but if he had been a different sort of man—"

"Being what he is you could never have sanctioned it," said Dr. Howard, gravely.

And then Mrs. Morant stole silently to the bedside, and the conversation ceased.

That night all was over. Far more swiftly and suddenly than the good doctor had anticipated, death came to Winalow Morant, and ere morning the husband and father had passed away.

Three weeks later as Jim Beaufort returned early one morning from parade, a letter in Gladys' handwriting, black-edged and sealed with black wax was put into his hand. Even before he opened it, a certainty of the news it contained was born in on him. The blow he had so dreaded had fallen, Gladys was fatherless.

It was a hot, sultry morning, albeit, it was only early in March, and as the native servant, who was awaiting his master's orders in the veranda of the bungalow, saw Beaufort turn pale and stagger to a chair, he imagined that the heat had overcome him, and hastened to assist him to take off his uniform and don a cool suit of mufti, set the punka going, and bring him a glass of iced whisky and soda; but Jim seated himself in the lounge chair, heedless of his efforts to help him, lay back with his eyes shut, the letter tightly grasped in his hands, and fell into a deep fit of thought; then he read Gladys' letter through a second time, pausing at the last paragraph with knitted brows, and a look of anguish in his eyes.

"You know, of course," it ran, "that we are now very poor, dear Jim, even poorer than we thought we should be, and I suppose that in a few months time we shall have to leave this altogether. Mother had hoped to hear from an old friend of father's before this, whom dear father had written to, asking him to do anything that came in his power to do, for us, in case of his death, but nothing has come from him. Sir Garnet Waterford is the only one of our acquaintances who has come forward with any offer of help—as soon as he heard of our trouble he wrote very kindly to mother, and has called here twice since. I did not see him the first time, but I did the last, and really he did seem quite grieved for us, and mother says offered his help to her in the kindest and most delicate way—to me he was friendly, but nothing more, he behaved as if he had quite forgotten—and perhaps he has—all that passed between us last year."

Jim Beaufort laid down the letter with a groan.

"Already!" he muttered. "He has not let the grass grow under his feet. Before a month has passed Mrs. Morant has got him into the house. She would sell her daughter to him for money and position. My poor, innocent, unsuspecting Gladys, how plainly I can see his game, and what he is leading up to. I shall lose her—I shall lose her, I force! Oh, why was I forced to leave with such a danger threatening her? Waterford will leave no stone unturned to win her, and Mrs. Morant will preach duty and gratitude, and spare neither entreaties nor persuasions, threats or commands to induce her to throw me over and accept him."

"What's wrong with Beaufort?" asked Captain Hallet after mess that night. "The fellow's been glum enough ever since he left England; but, by Jove, to-night he surpasses himself! Used to be a jolly, easy-going sort of fellow enough; can't think what's changed him."

"The climate—it's beastly," said his friend; "enough to—"

"Beaufort's had some bad news, I believe," put in Mr. Vandeleur, a chum of Jim's. "He got—I saw a letter from home for him with a black edge—that's what's upset him."

"Oh, indeed! but I thought Jim had scarcely a relation in the world," said the first speaker.

"No great misfortune," muttered another. "I've never found mine of much good."

"No, you've tired their patience out long ago, Pat," returned Vandeleur. "Jim has no very near relations, I believe; an uncle or aunt. I forget which, on his mother's side; Colonial folk, I fancy; and none of his own name nearer than the Marquis, who is a distant cousin; but Jim has friends for all that."

"Aye, better friends than relations, I say!" interposed Pat Molloy. "I'm sorry for Jim—"

very. My belief is that there's a lady in the case—"

"Pah! Jim's too poor to dream of matrimony, unless he's come across an heiress," said Hallet.

"Perhaps he did at home, and she's written to break it off. Is he engaged, Vandeleur, eh?" replied Molloy.

"Why don't you ask him, if you want to know, Pat," returned Vandeleur; "always go to the fountain head for information."

And Vandeleur turned away not wishing to be questioned any further about Beaufort's affairs, with which he was partially, but only partially acquainted.

Jim, ere he went to sleep that night, wrote a long letter to Gladys full of sorrow and sympathy for her grief and suffering. He longed to put her on her guard against Sir Garnet, and yet feared to say too much, lest he should imply a doubt of her truth and constancy; and for many days after he went about listless and preoccupied, longing for the mail from home to arrive, that further news from Gladys might reach him.

She wrote again, and a fortnight later the letter reached him. She said nothing further about Sir Garnet, however, and the absence of his name from her letter filled Jim's jealous heart with new terrors. Was she hiding anything from him—was she afraid to tell him what was going on?

There was one piece of good news in the letter, however, Mrs. Morant had heard from her father's old friend, Mr. Allingham; he had seen the notice of Captain Morant's death in the papers, and from a remote corner of Norway wrote to her mother a letter full of kindness and condolence, and announcing his intention of visiting Matcham as soon as he reached England, which he hoped to do in the course of ten days or a fortnight.

"He must be a charming old man, I should say, judging by his letter," wrote Gladys, "and mamma is much cheered by the prospect of seeing him. He has lived nearly all his life in Australia, and had seen a great deal of the world, he was in the same regiment with dear father when he first entered the service, and was his senior in rank by a few years."

"If he understands the world, if he is really what Gladys thinks him to be from his letter, he will never encourage Mrs. Morant in her project of forcing Gladys to marry Sir Garnet," thought Jim.

And that night, for the first time since he heard of Captain Morant's death, Jim slept soundly. Somehow he felt that Gladys had at length a friend to help her, and to whom she could turn in trouble.

The next day brought a surprise. The regiment was ordered at once to the frontier, where the border tribes had been giving trouble, and where an expedition to chastise them was being organised. In an hour after the order arrived Chundapore was a changed place, preparations for the march were begun, and every one had his hands full of work—even Jim had little time to think of his own affairs, those of the regiment, and the company, to which he was attached, put them for a time in the background.

Three days later and they were on their way to the front, a hasty line being all that Jim had time to despatch to Gladys, telling her of their change of quarters, and bidding her not to be surprised if his letters to her for the next few months were far less frequent, and arrived with far less regularity than usual.

CHAPTER III.

MR. ALLINGHAM received his friend's letter, and the newspaper in which he read the notice of his death, by the same mail.

He was in the little village of Kromberg, in an unfrequented corner of Norway when they reached him, and greatly was he grieved to hear of his old friend's decease.

"If I'd had any idea poor Morant was really so ill I would have returned from Paris, never undertaken this expedition, but gone down to Matcham at once," he said, "Poor Winalow! how well I remember him—a fine good-

hearted young fellow! Leaves two sons and four daughters, besides a widow! Good Heavens! and almost totally unprovided for! What a terrible anxiety to have had on one's mind when one was dying—poor Morant! I hope he felt that I would do all I could for them; I think he must have known I would! Now the first thing is to write to Mrs. Morant, and then to start for England as soon as possible."

Robert Allingham, though in reality two years older than the friend he had just lost, looked much younger than Captain Morant had done for several years past. He was tall, hale and hearty, with dark hair, just tinged with grey; a pleasant, handsome face, open, jovial, kindly manners, and a frank winning smile.

The greater part of his life had been spent on a large sheep farm he owned in Australia, and the discovery of a profitable gold mine on his property, had suddenly converted him from a well-to-do into a very wealthy man, whereupon he had resolved to return to his native land for good, and to make himself as well acquainted with Europe as he was the antipodes, to look up his old friends, and the few relations that were left to him, and to marry, of course, everyone said!

But the idea of marriage had never seriously entered Robert Allingham's head. Once upon a time, when he was almost a boy, he had loved, or fancied he loved, and the lady had proved false; before very long he had managed to overcome his disappointment and forget her, and since his life had been so busy and eventful that he had had no time to think of filling her place or settling down.

Though he was forty-eight years old his heart was young still. He did not think of himself as anything but a youngish man even yet, with a future before him and time enough left to enjoy life, and then settle down with a wife if he felt inclined.

Mrs. Morant started, when a fortnight after the receipt of his letter, Mr. Allingham himself, entered the cottage; he was so different to what she had expected. So much younger-looking, so much handsomer! could it be possible that Mr. Allingham was really the senior of her late husband? She could hardly credit it, but of course (and a thrill of bitterness and envy shot through her heart as she thought of it) Mr. Allingham was rich and hale, he had had no carking cases to worry him, no burden of anxieties to weigh him down, no hardships, disappointments, or reverses to put up with. All his life he had been prosperous and at ease. No wonder time had left such faint traces of its passage on his face, and that his laugh was as light, and his smile as joyful as a boy's still.

"And this is Mrs. Morant, the girl Winslow was so madly in love with," he thought as he met the sober, sorrowful, handsome widow, "and these are his daughters—ah! (as his eyes fell on Gladys) a charming face that, indeed, and who is this?"

The question was presently answered by Mrs. Morant, who, after presenting her daughters to their father's friend, turned to the small, fair, dissipated looking man with the languid aristocratic air, standing by the fireplace.

"Sir Garnet, this is Mr. Allingham, an old friend of my dear husband's—Mr. Allingham, our friend and neighbour, Sir Garnet Waterford."

The eyes of the two men met—a slight sneer curled Sir Garnet's lip as he bowed politely to his hostess's friend, whilst a look of instinctive aversion came into Mr. Allingham's eyes and his face grew stern as he returned the greeting. The Baronet took but little pains to conceal the contempt he felt for his hostess's "colonial friend," a man who had made his money in the wool trade and lived all his life nearly in the bush; and Robert Allingham, who by chance had become acquainted with some not very creditable episodes in the Baronet's past life, did not care to conceal how little pleasure it gave him to "make his acquaintance. In fact, Mr. Allingham had led such a simple, primitive life that he was filled with horror by what would have roused but a passing feeling of disapproval in the heart of a man of the world, and he was astonished to meet a man of Sir Garnet's notoriety in the quiet home of his friend's widow, and find him to be on

terms of friendship with her young daughters. He did not care to improve the acquaintance, and the few words he exchanged with Sir Garnet were cold and constrained. Mrs. Morant talked, volubly, and was evidently bent on putting them on a friendly footing, but in vain.

"You must have a great deal to talk to your husband's friend about, I know, Mrs. Morant," said Sir Garnet, after a little conversation had passed between them, and when Mr. Allingham had gone over to where the three younger girls were sitting, and begun to make friends with them, whilst Gladys stood shyly by looking on.

"I'll say good-night, and with your permission I will ride over again to-morrow or next day. Miss Morant, good evening."

Gladys turned to him and held out her hand coldly, Mr. Allingham's eyes fixed on her the while.

"Good-night, Sir Garnet," she said in a quiet voice, hardly letting her hand rest for an instant in his, and turning quickly from him.

"Thank goodness! She does not like him," thought Mr. Allingham. "Sir Garnet Waterford! Where did I first hear the name? Ah! I recollect—I thought as much, my instinct never deceives me! I cannot believe he was ever a great friend of poor Winslow's!"

It was not long before Mr. Allingham had made friends with everyone in the Morant household.

The girls, Fanny, Alice, and Violet adored him before a week had elapsed, the boys declared he was a trump—a good sort—an old brick—and Gladys was fain to allow that he was one of the most charming and kind-hearted of men.

Mrs. Morant, though she found it hard to forgive him for being so rich, whilst his old friend had died so poor, was obliged to acknowledge that unlike most rich men, he was exceedingly generous, and that his gifts and kindnesses were bestowed in the most delicate of ways—ways that neither hurt the self-esteem, nor humiliated the pride of those who received them.

"You are indeed good, a true friend," she said, with tears in her eyes. "My dear husband was right in trusting to your goodness of heart. If you only knew what a comfort it is to have some one to open one's heart to, some one I can trust and on whose advice I can rely! With a large family to bring up, and educate and manage, a woman is very helpless unless she has a friend on whose judgment she can rely to help her. There—there—is one thing—one very particular thing, I should like to consult you about, my dear Mr. Allingham."

"You may depend on my giving you the best advice in my power, if you honour me with your confidence, Mrs. Morant," he returned, seating himself beside her, and looking earnestly at her with his dark, piercing eyes.

Her own felt beneath them. Should she tell him all about Gladys, or not? He had been three weeks at Matcham now, and she fancied he liked Gladys. He was not really so very old—if—if—well! she would tell him about Sir Garnet, but would say nothing about Jim Beaufort.

Gladys persisted in her dislike to Sir Garnet, but she certainly did not dislike Mr. Allingham. As to Jim, a marriage between them was not to be thought of for a moment, under any circumstances, as she had told Gladys.

"Well! my dear lady!" he said, as Mrs. Morant paused.

"It—it is about Gladys," she said at last, fixing her eyes on him.

She saw him start, and his face change. She was not wrong then!

"About Gladys—Miss Morant, I mean," he replied, "what is it?"

"Well! you see, Gladys—I may be partial, perhaps, but Gladys is pretty, and—and—"

"Miss Gladys is more than pretty," said Mr. Allingham, "she is clever and charming as well, besides possessing one of the sweetest and truest natures I ever met."

"Ah! you appreciate her, I see," replied Mrs. Morant. "Well, then, you will not be surprised to learn that there is someone who wishes to rob me of Gladys!"

There was a pause. Mr. Allingham waited to hear more, but Mrs. Morant was silent.

"To—to marry her you mean?" he said slowly. "No, indeed, I am not surprised."

"Yes, to marry her," said Mrs. Morant.

"And she loves him, you approve of the match?" asked Mr. Allingham.

"Approve—ah! on that point I want your opinion—your advice," said the lady.

"If Miss Gladys loves him—if there is nothing against him," began Mr. Allingham,

"I am not at all sure of how Gladys feels," replied Mrs. Morant, carefully. "Some months ago she refused him, but he has come forward again, and perhaps Gladys might be more willing to accept him now than she was then, seeing—seeing how our circumstances have altered for—"

"But, surely, Mrs. Morant, you would not wish—tell me, who is the gentleman?" asked Mr. Allingham, anxiously.

"Oh! do not think for a moment that I would try to force—to induce Gladys to accept a man she disliked, because of any worldly advantage she might gain by it," said Mrs. Morant, quickly, as she noticed a look of surprise and uneasiness on her friend's face, "it would be a splendid match for Gladys of course. Sir Garnet Waterford has a large fortune—"

"Sir Garnet Waterford! he has proposed to Miss Gladys!" cried Mr. Allingham in a tone of horror, "do you know Sir Garnet well, Mrs. Morant?"

"Very well," replied the widow sweetly, "we have been neighbours for years, and he has admired Gladys ever since she was a child, almost—he is of course a good deal older than she is, but with a girl of Gladys's temperament and decided character, that is of no consequence; he is pleasant, well-born, and at heart, good, I believe, although like many men there are things in his life one regrets—that one would wish—"

"My dear Mrs. Morant," said Mr. Allingham, gravely, "I doubt if you know Sir Garnet as well as I do—I have heard—"

"Ah! but one must not believe all one hears, you know," replied Mrs. Morant, "I wish with all my heart his early life had been steadier, but I believe he is steady enough now, and if Gladys could only bring herself to like him—to forget her foolish prejudice against him, for the sake of others, to think of us—of—"

"Then I gather that Miss Gladys still refuses to listen to him," said Mr. Allingham.

"She does—Gladys is young—she thinks too much of her own individual likings and dislikes, of herself in fact, and not enough of others, she—"

"But, Mrs. Morant, excuse me—I do not think you know—how—how—Good Heaven! Sir Garnet's reputation is a most unenviable one," cried Mr. Allingham.

"Are you not a little inclined to be prejudiced against him, too? Common rumour having been busy with his name some years ago, has made people fight shy of him I know, but of late years his life has been blameless—"

"Or he has been more careful to hide his misdoings," put in Mr. Allingham.

"Is that quite generous—are you judging him fairly?" asked Mrs. Morant, deprecatingly.

Mr. Allingham's face changed, he got up and walked to the window—he thought of Gladys, young, pure, innocent, and shuddered to think of her being forced, or persuaded, into marrying a man of Sir Garnet's reputation by her mother's threats or entreaties. Mrs. Morant, as he had not been long in discovering, was a worldly woman, who looked on money as the one great good in life, it was more than probable, let him say or do what he might, that she would exert herself to the uttermost to bring about a marriage between Sir Garnet and her child. Her asking his advice on the matter was a mere pretence; he felt that everything he could say against the match would be politely listened to, but nothing more. He fancied that he could now perfectly understand the cause of Gladys's grave, and looks, it must be terrible to her to know that she was refusing, in declining to marry Sir Garnet all that her mother most wished for,

rank, riches—the power to help her family in their troubles.

What could he do to help her, to guard her against the misery he knew would await her, did she consent to marry Sir Garnet? Mrs. Morant was a proud woman—he had done what he could for her—undertaken the educational expenses of the sons—his old friend's boys; but for herself and for her daughters, she would accept no pecuniary help from him—from her son-in-law of course, she would have no scruples in accepting aid, and Sir Garnet was a wealthy man!

He stood for some minutes at the window lost in thought, his features working, his face pale and agitated. There was one thing he could do which, if she so willed it, might save Gladys from the fate that she was threatened with.

He turned slowly to Mrs. Morant.

"You are right, my dear lady," he said, in a low voice; "I fear it is quite out of my power to advise you impartially in this case."

"Indeed! How so?" she said, her heart beating quickly.

"Because, if Sir Garnet is not too old to become Miss Gladys's husband, Mrs. Morant, neither am I," he said; "and I—"

"You!" she said, with well-feigned astonishment; "you! I don't quite understand."

"Yes, me," he said, firmly, though his face was very pale. "Mrs. Morant, I have no title to offer your lovely daughter, but—"

"Title! as if I cared for that," cried Mrs. Morant; "my dear Mr. Allingham you do me and my little Gladys too much honour. I feel sure she will not say no to you; she likes, esteems, respects you so highly she—"

"But shall I ever win her love? Is her heart her own?" he asked, earnestly. "I cannot expect to win Gladys as easily as a younger man might; but if her love is not given to anyone else I might in time gain it; with your permission I will try."

"My dear friend you have my permission and my wishes, my prayers for your success," said Mrs. Morant, fervently. "I am sure when Gladys learns—when you speak to Gladys, she—"

"But I must have time; Gladys knows but little of me yet, Mrs. Morant," he answered. "I must leave Matcham in a few days, promise me that you will say nothing to Gladys about this matter till I return, and that you will give Sir Garnet his *congé* at once."

"Certainly, if you wish it; but Sir Garnet is an unpleasant enemy to have," she said a little uneasily.

"I do not think we need fear him," replied Mr. Allingham; "and it is better he should be got out of the way at once. I have your promise then, Mrs. Morant?"

"Yes," she returned, giving him her hand with a smile, "and you will have Gladys's soon, I trust."

CHAPTER IV.

"ARE you bent upon breaking my heart and ruining us all, then, Gladys?" said Mrs. Morant, her face fixed and stern, but her eyes full of tears. "Have you no consideration for anyone but yourself? You have refused one excellent offer, and lost us one good friend; will you refuse a second and alienate from us the only friend we have left? Oh, it is wicked, cruel, shameful! and all for a man who slights you, and is evidently learning to forget you."

"Mother, mother, don't say so; how can you be so cruel!" cried poor Gladys, tearfully.

"Cruel! because I tell you the truth! How long is it since you last heard from Jim Beaufort, tell me that! Three months and more, if I mistake not!" returned Mrs. Morant, scornfully.

"Yes; I do not deny it," replied poor Gladys, miserably, "but it is an accident I am certain; I shall hear from him soon. I don't understand why I have not had a letter; he used to write so regularly."

Mrs. Morant understood quite well, however, how it was that Gladys had received no letters of

late from her lover. Three of Jim Beaufort's letters lay locked away in her own desk at that moment, of which Gladys knew nothing.

From the moment Mr. Allingham had told her of his intentions towards her daughter, she had made up her mind that all correspondence between Gladys and Jim Beaufort must cease at once.

The letter containing his change of address, and the news of the regiment's being ordered on service was in her hands. Nevertheless she replied to Gladys's remark with a bitter laugh.

"You have great faith in your lover, Gladys; if you knew the world a little better you would know how easily very young men forget. I have always told you that you were throwing away yourself and your time on Jim. Why, it may be years and years before he is in a position to marry; and do you flatter yourself that he will keep true to you all these years, poor child!—that he will love you when you are a faded old maid, as he professed to love you when he went away? Ah, Gladys, for once believe that I know better than you do. Don't send away this good, kind friend!—the man to whom we all owe so much; who is as noble and upright as he is generous and kind! But you can't appreciate him, I suppose?" she added, with a voice full of scorn; "because he is no longer in his first youth, because he has a few grey hairs and—"

"I do appreciate him, mother; I do like him very, very much," cried Gladys. "Oh! mother, mother, it is not—"

"And you would learn to love him in time, Gladys," interrupted Mrs. Morant, "if you would only try."

Gladys shook her head.

"I should never love him—not as I love Jim!"

"As you love a man who doesn't even take the trouble to write to you—who does his best to show you he is sick of you! Gladys you will drive me mad!" cried Mrs. Morant. "You were always obstinate from your childhood, and never cared much for me, or for your sisters, but I did not believe you were quite so selfish as you are now showing yourself to be. Do you mean then to condemn the girls and me to subsist on my wretched pittance for the future? Are we to be turned out of our home (and she sobbed), because of—"

"Oh! mother don't—don't cry so," said Gladys miserably, trying to put her arms round her mother's neck; but Mrs. Morant repulsed her almost fiercely. "I do love you and the girls, I would do anything for—"

"Anything but the one thing you can do," answered Mrs. Morant. "Oh! it is hard—hard! and Violet—think of Violet! Well! I will leave you Gladys, it is useless to remonstrate with you, I suppose, and—I must write to Mr. Allingham and tell him, it will be better for him not to come here again."

Mrs. Morant rose as she spoke, and staggered, rather than walked, to the door. Gladys sank down on to the sofa white and miserable.

The trial was a severe one. She knew there was much truth in her mother's words. She knew they were very poor, and that Mr. Allingham was the only friend they had, able to help them—that if she refused him, he would be lost to them (or so she believed), and that if she accepted him their troubles (very real ones) would be over. Violet was ill—a change to a warmer climate was her one chance of recovery, but without money the change was impossible—if she refused Mr. Allingham her sister's death might lie at her door! Oh! if Jim had only written! Could it be true that he was forgetting her as her mother said!

For a long time she sat buried in deep thought, then she rose from her seat and slowly mounted the stairs to her own room.

"I will wait till the next mail comes in," she resolved, "it should be here to-morrow or the next day. I will tell mother not to write to Mr. Allingham till Wednesday."

And that night when she kissed her mother before going to bed, Gladys whispered to her to defer writing to Mr. Allingham for one day longer.

She was at the window, waiting for the post-

man to arrive next morning, and her heart almost stopped beating as she saw him coming to the gate. He held a letter in his hand—she flew to the door to take it. Alas! it was only a business letter for her mother. Her heart sank again, and she walked sadly back to the dining-room.

Next day Mrs. Morant was at the door when the postman knocked.

"A letter for me, mother!" Gladys asked eagerly and nervously.

"Only this," replied Mrs. Morant holding up a circular. "Were you expecting a letter, Gladys?"

But Gladys did not reply. She turned away white as death. Hoped died out of her heart—Jim had not written!

"Poor child, but it is better so," said Mrs. Morant to herself. "Oh! why did James Beaufort ever come here—it was like poor Winslow to encourage his visits, and never to foresee what they might lead to."

And when she reached her own dressing-room Mrs. Morant drew from her pocket a letter which she proceeded to put away along with several others in her desk. Then she paused.

"No use to keep them, it will be safer to burn them at once," she muttered.

And lighting a taper she burnt the letters remorselessly on the hearth and then swept away the ashes carefully, lest they might tell tales and give rise to suspicions. Scarcely had she finished when a low trembling knock came at the door, and Gladys's entered.

"Dear child, how ill you look, what is it Gladys, my darling?" cried Mrs. Morant taken off her guard and feeling really frightened at her child's look.

Her mother's loving words touched Gladys far more than her reproaches had done, her voice trembled as she replied,—

"I—I have come about that letter to Mr. Allingham, mother," she said, falteringly.

Mrs. Morant sighed.

"Have you thought the matter over well, as I entreated you, Gladys," she said, "have you seen poor Violet this morning? have you determined—"

"Oh! mother, don't reproach me any more," interrupted Gladys, wearily, "I give in—I give up my own will—my love—my happiness—everything! for your sake. I will marry Mr. Allingham."

"You will! Now Heaven be praised. Oh! Gladys, if you only knew the weight you have lifted from my heart!" cried Mrs. Morant, joyfully, "you will be rewarded, my child, for your self-denial, believe me. In time, you will see and rejoice you have acted so well and wisely—in time you will love Mr. Allingham far more than you now fancy you—"

"Don't mother, don't speak of—of that!" interposed Gladys in a stifled voice, "I am doing this for your sake and Violet's. I don't care any more about myself. If he had written—if I had heard from him to-day, it might have been different. I might not have done it, but if, as you say, he has forgotten me, what does it matter to me what I do, what becomes of me! If Mr. Allingham likes to take me, let him. I shall not deceive him, though, mother, I shall not tell him I love him. I shall tell him—"

"You—you'll not tell him about that foolish affair with James Beaufort, surely?" cried Mrs. Morant, aghast.

"I don't know, why should I not?" replied Gladys.

"Why should you? it would be very foolish to do so—very unnecessary. Don't say a word about it, Gladys, take my advice," cried Mrs. Morant, anxiously.

"I cannot deceive him, he is so good and kind, he deserves all the trust and confidence I can give him," answered Gladys, sadly but firmly, "I shall have to speak of it, mother."

"Then let me tell him, surely that will be better, my dear, returned Mrs. Morant, persuasively.

"Very well, if you wish," answered Gladys, with a heavy sigh, "it will certainly save me an unpleasant task, and—"

"Very well, I will do it then, as you wish him

to be told, but don't look so miserable, try to cheer up, Gladys, darling," replied Mrs. Morant, "In two days Mr. Allingham will be here, you must not meet him with a sad face. Ah! if you could realise the difference this resolve of yours will make in all our lives, Gladys, you would rejoice as I do, instead of lamenting! I own, when I think of Violet—"

"Ah! yes! dear little Violet," said Gladys, dreamily.

"I—I bless you for doing as I wish. I knew you would think of her, of all of us and not condemn us to poverty. Gladys, you have saved us by your self-denial and thoughtfulness."

And Mrs. Morant threw her arms round her daughter and kissed her warmly.

Gladys returned her embraces but there was something in her lips that sent a chill to the mother's heart, she knew not why.

"Let us write the letter, mother," she said, letting her mother's arms fall from around her neck. "we ought not to keep Mr. Allingham waiting, I suppose."

"I'll write at once, if you wish," replied Mrs. Morant, "yes, you are quite right, he must be very anxious for he loves you dearly. How delighted he will be to get my letter."

So the letter was written and despatched. A joyful answer was received, and two days later Mr. Allingham arrived.

Mrs. Morant took care that the news of the engagement should be spread abroad. The three girls, Fanny, Alice and Violet, were in ecstasies of delight when they heard of it. Mr. Allingham had won their hearts long ago, and they looked on Gladys as the most highly favoured and fortunate of girls, an opinion most people shared with them, for Mr. Allingham's wealth was known, and he had made a very favourable impression in the little circle of society in and around Matcham. Congratulations poured in from all sides, and Mrs. Morant was in her glory. Her ambition was satisfied, her fears for the present and the future, set at rest. Were she to die to-morrow her children would have a protector able and willing to do all and everything for them, and whilst she lived she knew that she would feel the sting of poverty no more.

"I thought it better to tell you about poor young Beaufort's foolish love for Gladys. You know, my dear Mr. Allingham," she said a week or ten days later, "people are so ill-natured and fond of making mischief, and it is best always to be entirely open and above board. It was a mere boy and girl affair which I never countenanced—nothing serious you understand."

"Yes, yes, I quite understand of course," replied Robert Allingham, speaking indifferently enough. "I had a similar affair myself (my only love affair, think of that) when I was about the same age, Mrs. Morant. No! I'll say nothing to Gladys about it, why should I?"

But he looked grave as he remembered the expression of sadness he had so often noticed on Gladys's face, and wondered whether it was the remembrance of her youthful love affair that caused it!

"I'm glad you told me of it," he resumed, after a pause, "and I think all the better of Gladys for wishing me to know it. So many fatal misunderstandings arise from foolish, trivial concealments in married life. Now, Mrs. Morant, let us settle when we shall take Violet abroad, and where we shall go. I suppose I must not expect Gladys to become my wife for a few months yet, from what she says. We will have a good time all together abroad first, and then Violet will be well and strong enough to play her part as bridesmaid when we return."

So it was settled, and a fortnight later the whole party started for the Riviera, and Ivy Cottage was shut up for the season.

Nothing could exceed the comfort, nay, luxuriousness of the way in which the journey was performed. It was carried out by easy stages for Violet's sake, and at every place at which they halted Mr. Allingham secured rooms for them at the best hotel, and insisted on taking the whole party to see the sights and to visit all the places of interest near them. Alice and Fanny were in the seventh heaven of enjoyment and delight, and even Gladys could not

but feel an interest, if a feeble one at times, in the new sights and scenes that surrounded her.

It was delightful to see the girls so happy, her mother so content, and Violet improving day by day. And if Mr. Allingham were generous in his hospitality, and in the arrangements he made everywhere for their comfort, he was not less so in his plans for the future.

It was some time before Mrs. Morant could lead him to speak of the all important matter of settlements; but when he did so and explained his intentions towards Gladys, Mrs. Morant was fairly astonished at his lavish ideas, and dazzled at the bright prospects before her daughter.

"She is much younger (alas! that I should be so much her senior) than I am," he said. "She will, in all probability, outlive me by many years. I shall settle three thousand a year on her, and leave her a considerable amount as well. Generous! oh, nonsense, my dear Mrs. Morant, what can a man do better with his money than leave it to his wife, tell me that!"

And he laughed gaily.

"Gladys is a fortunate girl, my dear Mr. Allingham," returned Mrs. Morant, "singularly fortunate. She ought to be very, very grateful to you."

A shadow passed over Mr. Allingham's face at her words, but he said nothing; Mrs. Morant observed it, and wisely, was silent.

"I must not make him fancy Gladys thinks of these things," she said to herself. "The child is a perfect baby about money affairs, and would marry without a settlement at all I dare say, if I didn't look after it. I shall tell her though of Mr. Allingham's intentions."

She did so, and was almost angry at the indifference with which Gladys received the (to her) all important news!

CHAPTER V.

The little frontier war to which Jim Beaufort's regiment had been sent was over, and after much hard marching, many privations, and some sharp fighting, the ———— was ordered back to Chundapore; but ere the return march began, poor Jim Beaufort fell sick of fever, and it was a month after the regiment arrived at its old station that he was able to rejoin.

The first thing he did when he arrived at Chundapore was to inquire for letters; none had reached him from Gladys for many, many weeks, and he was full of anxiety on her account.

Several of his brother officers, however, had received no news from home whilst in the field, and Jim hoped, and, indeed, felt quite satisfied, that when he reached Chundapore he should find quite a pile of letters in Gladys's well-known handwriting awaiting him.

His surprise and dismay therefore, when among such letters as he did find, not one from Gladys was to be found, may be imagined.

"What's wrong, Jim?" asked Vandeleur, his chum, as he saw the look of pained disappointment on Jim's white face, "Fever again, eh?"

"No; but tell me, Van, I can't understand it, have you got your English letters yet? those you ought to have received long ago, I mean?"

"Yes; I found some here and some had gone to Mac Alister's, the agents in Calcutta, and were not forwarded till a few days ago. I've had a pile of them."

"Ah!" interrupted Jim, his face brightening, "the agents! I never thought of them, my letters may have gone there too. I—I expected to get some—a—very special letter—to find it awaiting me here, Van, and it's not come. I'll write off to Mac Alister and Co., at once, and inquire for it."

"You couldn't do better," replied Vandeleur; "it's always the way on service, half one's correspondence goes astray. Not much to be wondered at perhaps, though, I remember one time getting a letter that had followed me about for nearly a year, from place to place!"

Jim wrote at once to Mac Alister and Co., the regimental agents and waited anxiously for their reply; it came in the course of a week. "No letters for Mr. Beaufort had arrived to their care!"

No letters! Jim's heart gave a sudden bound, and then stood still. No letters! and it was four or five months since he had had a line from Gladys!

Had they turned her against him? Had Mrs. Morant succeeded in persuading her to give him up—or—or—Oh! Heaven, was she ill—dead perhaps! (and a cold faint feeling came over him). Yet, if that had been so, surely he would have heard from Mrs. Morant, or one of the girls.

They would not have been so inhuman as not to write, and if Gladys had given him up, surely she would have written him a line of farewell! No; neither of these could be the cause of her silence—what could it be? Yes! the letters must have gone astray, presently they would turn up!

But the doubt and uncertainty was hard to bear, and filled him with uneasiness. He felt terribly weak and ill; daily the fever returned, taking all the life and strength out of him, till at last he was put on the sick list and found himself once more in the doctor's hands.

So a month passed, and then one morning two letters—English letters—were brought to him as he sat, weak and weary, in the verandah after an almost sleepless night.

One was in Gladys's handwriting. He opened it eagerly, tossing the other aside, and read the contents, consternation and dismay depicted in every line of his countenance.

"Why do you not write to me, dear! It is so long since I heard from you," wrote Gladys, "week after week I wait and hope and no letter comes! Have you forgotten me, or are you ill? I am miserable thinking of you and picturing you to myself, sick and lonely, with no one by to look after you—for I cannot—I will not believe that what they say, what mamma says, is true, and that you are forgetting me!"

Forgetting! Jim threw down his letter with an exclamation of rage and grief.

"They are trying to make her think that. Weeks without hearing! Good Heavens! and I have written so regularly. When did she write this!"

He turned eagerly to the beginning of the letter to ascertain the date. The letter had been written long, long before, and had wandered up country, following the regiment from station to station. Oddly enough when Gladys wrote it, she did not seem to have received the news of the regiment being sent on service, and yet his letter telling her so should have reached her before then.

"Well, she must have got lots of letters from me since she wrote that," he thought. "I shall hear next mail, and she will tell me so. My poor darling! how miserable and upset she seems. She is suffering and they are making her wretched I can see. Oh, if I could only get home, if I could only marry her; but that is out of the question at present, and when is it likely to be in my power, I wonder?"

His head sank on his breast as he thought of his poverty and the time that must elapse before he would get his company, and his heart felt very heavy. It might be a long, long time yet before he saw Gladys again, and as to their marriage that was a long way off.

His eyes fell on the second letter the post had brought him. He took it up carelessly, and looked at it.

"Mason and Cartwright! Some circular or a dun, perhaps; not that I owe much money, I'm thankful to think," he muttered, "let's see what it is; I wish I'd all the money some people spend in advertising and postage!"

He opened the letter with a sigh, and began to read it carelessly; then a sudden change came over his face. It filled with surprise, eagerness, and delight.

"By Jove!" he cried, "nothing but the unexpected ever does happen, as they say. Just now I was saying to myself that it would be years before I could marry Gladys and calling myself a miserable beggar, and here I am the possessor of a fortune, a moment later, and able to marry her if she were here to-morrow. Why, Mrs. Morant even would not say 'no,' now!—two thousand a-year! I can't believe it."

But true enough it was. Jim Beaufort's only relation, his mother's brother, an entire stranger to him, a rich South African merchant, had died, and left him the whole of his large fortune.

I must go home at once. Thank goodness, I shall have no difficulty in getting leave. Thornton wanted to invalid me yesterday for a year, but I begged him not. I'll ask him to do it at once now. Oh! Gladys, Gladys, my darling, I shall soon be with you, bear up dear heart! Be true to me and we shall be happy, our troubles are all over."

For a moment Jim Beaufort buried his face in his hands, and big tears filled his eyes—the relief, the joy was intense, he could hardly believe in his good fortune.

A day or two later the leave he wished for was granted, and in a week Jim was on his way to England.

Meanwhile Gladys had been trying conscientiously, to adapt herself to her new circumstances, and to treat her intended with affection and confidence.

Robert Allingham, however, was not long in discovering that though Gladys liked him, that though she respected and trusted him, yet her heart was not his, that there was something between them, some barrier that was keeping them apart, and which he would have to surmount ere he could gain her love.

Mrs. Morant had told him of her daughter's early love affair, and treated it as a joke almost. Was it possible that it had affected her far more deeply than her mother believed? Was it possible that she had not yet forgotten it?

Robert Allingham, as he noticed the sad, wistful look in Gladys's eyes, felt a deep pang of pity for her.

Well, it should not be his fault if she were not happy—if she could be made to forget he would make her, he would devote his whole life to her, do everything and anything, give up everything or anything for her sake.

Perhaps in time she would love him; but at present she did not, and with rare tact Robert Allingham forbore to speak to her of love.

Gradually his manner became more and more fatherly towards her, kinder if anything than before, but without the dart of loverlike solicitude in it that had at first characterised it, and filled Gladys's heart with uneasiness.

Yet why could she not love him? why did the idea of marrying him make her still shrink and tremble? How kind and considerate and gentle he was—so thoughtful of her every want, so quick to meet her wishes in every way. Surely if she had searched the world over she could not have found a more true-hearted lovable man for her husband than Robert Allingham.

Loyally Gladys tried to love him—to put all thoughts of Jim out of her mind—to check her roving heart when it would recall the old days, and her fancy when it would lead her to think of where and how Jim was, and why he had forsaken her—to wonder if he had quite, quite forgotten the dear old days, which were not so very long ago either, when they used to wander about in the sweet spring time at Matcham. It made her ashamed of herself sometimes when she looked around and saw all that Mr. Allingham had done for her and her family—the lovely house, the carriages and horses he had put at their disposal, the luxuries that surrounded them, and Violet looking the picture of health once more, that she could not love him as she felt she ought, but Gladys possessed one of those natures to which change is impossible. With her to love once was to love always, and though she tried hard to forget she could not, and though she felt that Robert Allingham was worthy of all esteem, she knew that she had, and never would have, any real love to give him, and the knowledge made her miserable, and filled her with a deep sense of humiliation. Was she not deceiving this good man who loved her? Was she not wrong in promising to be his?

Yet in a way she had told him the truth, and he had bade her be content, that he was satisfied, and that in time all would be well.

(Continued on page 596.)

OSWALD CAMPION'S DILEMMA.

—10—

THE Rev. Oswald Campion sat deep in thought in a small room in a Bloomsbury boarding-house. His thin and naturally thoughtful face wore a worried and hopeless look, and his tall figure seemed to stoop under some heavy burden.

"How will it all end?" he murmured. "Heaven help me in this trouble."

Wearily he arose and crossed to the fire place. He strove to warm his numb fingers over the small handful of embers in the grate, then, with a sigh, rested his arm on the mantel. Again he sighed, and passed his long, thin hands over his brow. A sudden terrible thought occurred to him.

"God of mercy," he cried, "add not that to my cup of bitterness!"

He started violently as the door was opened, and a gentleman entered quietly.

Campion tried to speak, but his dry lips refused their office. Seeing his agitation, his visitor said calmly:

"I congratulate you, Mr. Campion; you have a son."

"And my wife?"

"Is doing as well as can be expected; but, as you know, she is far from strong, and requires every care."

"I know," said the young clergyman, sadly. "May I go and see her?"

"Certainly, but do not excite her."

Campion's pale face flushed, but it was by excitement rather than joy, for the weight on his heart was too heavy to be easily raised. With merely a slight bow to the medical man, he went up stairs.

During the few minutes he was allowed to remain in his wife's room he strove desperately to hide his anxiety and encourage the girl-mother, who glanced at him wistfully as he looked at his new-born heir.

"Cheer up, Edith, my darling," he said, brightly, as he kissed her pale face; "you will soon be well again now, and then we will get away from this busy city."

"Ah! Oswald," she whispered, pressing his hand affectionately, "if we could do so! But I am so troubled to know how we shall manage now."

"You mustn't bother yourself, dearest. We shall do splendidly. I have heard of a vacancy awaiting an assistant pastor, and I have every hope that I shall obtain the position. So keep up your spirits."

"But meantime, dear, what are we to do?"

"Do! Why, do the best we can."

"But have you any money, Oswald? You know you told me yesterday you did not know what to do for current expenses."

"Yesterday! Oh! that was a long time ago. I have plenty now. Robinson has paid me that two pounds that has been owing so long, so for the present we are all right," he said, gayly.

"But, Oswald—"

"There, darling; Doctor Thornton said you were not to be excited, so I must not let you talk any more."

He kissed her again, as an old woman, who was doing duty as nurse, entered, and then quietly withdrew.

He paused on the landing, and a look of blank despair settled on his features.

"Heaven forgive me for those lies!" he thought. "But I could not let my poor girl lie there, weak and ill, and fret about money affairs. It is bad enough to have to do so when you are well and strong, but for her now it would be terrible."

He re-entered his room and sat down at the table. Then he proceeded to turn out his pockets. He found a solitary six-pence and a few pennies. He surveyed his possessions and murmured, bitterly:

"Something must be done at once. I will cast my ridiculous pride on one side, and will call on Mr. Pearson. I don't suppose it is much after three, so I shall have time to catch him to-day."

Without hesitation he put on his hat—which unfortunately gave too evident signs of its owner's impecuniosity—and left the house.

Oswald Campion's was a common case. The only son of a struggling lawyer, he had received a good school education, and had finally been sent to college. He obtained his degree with honours, and then had decided to blossom out as a young clergyman. Almost as soon as he had done so he obtained a position as assistant pastor in a rural town, at a salary of one hundred pounds a year.

Here he had met Edith Burton, the orphan daughter of a struggling farmer, and their acquaintance had speedily ripened into love.

Meanwhile Campion's father died, leaving only sufficient property to insure his widow a bare maintenance.

As time went on, the young man pressed his sweetheart to marry him at once, and painted such glowing pictures of their future, brightened by love, and ennobled by their religious work, that the girl at last consented.

Their bright views early received a rude shock. Campion's marriage much displeased his pastor, who fully understood that a "single" clergyman made a church attractive to the unmarried ladies of the congregation.

So one day, when Oswald had preached a sermon embodying bold and striking views, the pastor seized the opportunity to cast doubts on the young man's orthodoxy, and to gently hint that he might find a more congenial sphere of work elsewhere.

The young clergyman's sensitive nature was wounded, and, without weighing the consequences, he promptly resigned his charge.

Then he went to London where he thought his sincerity would insure him success. Alas! he knew not that clergymen in large cities, if they hope to succeed, must be very diplomatic in their discourses—must preach to please, and not to reform.

Too proud to play the toady, he was overlooked by the powerful. Too sincere and intellectual to preach commonplace but "taking" sermons, he could not impress the masses, and, lacking assumption and confidence, he was pushed aside by inferior but stronger men.

Thus it was that after six months struggle he felt that he had exhausted every resource, but found himself with a sick wife and a young infant to provide for on a capital of tenpence and prospects nothing.

Wearily and with flagging footsteps, Campion took his way along the London streets. He looked longingly at the omnibuses and trams, but he felt that his small capital would not justify the expenditure of even a penny; so he plodded onward.

It was February, and snow was falling thickly, so that the streets were "slushy;" and the cold air affected even the well-clad.

The poor clergyman in his threadbare clothes and without an overcoat, felt the keen weather intensely; and his sensitive body suffered an amount of discomfort that coarser natures never experience.

Every step reminded him that his boots were worn down at the heels, and a suspicious "whish" and feeling of dampness to his toes warned him that one of them was not even weather-proof. At last he paused in front of a large warehouse in Old-street.

He glanced up and saw the name, "Pearson & Co., Paper Dealers," and knew that he had reached his destination.

He paused, however, on the threshold, feeling that terrible sinking that occurs to nervous men when they find themselves in a position repugnant to their feelings.

At last he summoned up sufficient courage to enter the office. A dapper young clerk stared at him rudely, and then, with an easy air of insolence, asked him what he required.

"I wish to see Mr. Pearson."

"Hum! I know he is very busy. Can you state your business?"

"Certainly not, to you, sir," said the clergyman, in a tone that caused the other evident surprise.

The young clerk, however, crossed to an older clerk, and made a whispered communication. The elder man glanced round, and then said in a tone loud enough to reach Campion,—

"Oh, you had better take up his name. The governor's always willing to see a parson."

The young man recrossed to the clergyman, and taking his card disappeared into an inner room. Presently he returned, saying,—

"Step this way, please."

Campion followed his conductor, and was ushered into a comfortably-furnished office. He saw before him a stout, pompous-looking gentleman seated at a desk, who glanced up at his visitor entered, but hope died out of the clergyman's heart as he caught the look of complacency on the florid countenance.

Mr. Pearson pushed his papers on one side, and, with a pious look, said,—

"Take a seat, Mr. Campion; I am always glad to see the ministers of the gospel, although I am usually busy just at present."

"I would not willingly disturb you; I can call some other time."

"By no means, my friend. My motto has always been, God's work before worldly affairs, and I judge by your garb that you come in His name."

"I trust so," said the clergyman; then plunging into his business, he continued,—

"I saw your advertisement in yesterday's *Times*, asking for clerical or lay workers, for your Lodging House Mission, and I thought perhaps

"That we could utilize your services. Indeed, we can. There is work enough for all in the Lord's vineyard. Have you an appointment in the city?"

"Unfortunately, I have not at present."

"And, naturally, you do not wish to waste time that is so precious and can never be recovered. We will gladly enroll you among our workers. The harvest is great, but, alas! the labourers are few," said Mr. Pearson, turning his eyes upwards.

Campion paused, then said, desperately,—

"I fear you do not quite understand me. I am anxious, most anxious, to work, but I have a wife and child to consider. What I therefore seek is employment that will afford at least some slight pecuniary return. I thought you might—"

"What!" interrupted the other, opening his eyes wide in astonishment. "What do I hear! Do you come to tell me that you wish to enter our grand cause from mercenary motives!"

"Certainly not, sir; but, surely, the 'labourer is worthy of his hire.'"

"Alas! that holy text is too often made an excuse for avariciousness," said the other, raising his hand deprecatingly. "But let us not bandy words. If I give my services, without hope of pecuniary recompense, surely I have a right to expect others to do the same."

"Truly, sir, but you are wealthy, you can afford it. If you had a wife and child wanting the bare necessities of life, would you then be willing to do so?"

"I see," said Pearson, raising his eyebrows superciliously. "I quite misunderstood you. I did not think you were one of those unscrupulous individuals who don the garb of a clergyman as an excuse for begging."

"Sir," said Campion, indignantly, "I am at least entitled to my costume, I am fully ordained, and—"

"Well, well," said the other, "I have neither time nor inclination to listen to your private affairs." Then he struck a bell, and as his clerk entered, said,—

"Johnson, show this person out."

Campion retired, feeling terribly humiliated; as he opened the office door he heard the clerk, with a laugh, say to his colleague,—

"I thought he looked too seedy to be of much account."

Utterly dejected, Campion walked back towards his home. It was five o'clock, and the streets were, comparatively speaking, quiet. The snow was still falling, and a fierce wind drove it into the faces of the pedestrians. He had tasted nothing since breakfast, and paused as he came to a restaurant. The odour of food in process of cooking was very tempting to the hungry man, but he moved on, determined not to lessen his small store.

Just then an elderly gentleman came out of the restaurant, and turned up the street in front of the clergyman. The young man followed aimlessly, and almost unconsciously kept his eyes fixed on the figure before him. Suddenly the stranger placed his hand in his pocket and drew out his handkerchief, apparently to wipe the snow from his face. As he did so, Campion noticed something fall into the snow. He quickened his steps, uttering a feeble "Stop, sir!" but the wind carried away his voice. He halted and picked up the article, and shuddered violently when he found a pocket-book in his hand, that from its size seemed to be well filled.

Visions of the importance of the treasure to him flashed through his mind, and for a moment he determined to retain it. Then the natural honesty of his pure nature asserted itself, and he looked round for the owner. The delay, however, had been fatal; he just caught sight of the old gentleman stepping into an omnibus, and then the bus rolled off, leaving the young man too bewildered to follow it.

With mingled feelings that he could not analyze, the clergyman walked homeward. He forgot his weariness and his hunger; even the biting wind and cold driving sleet affected him not, for he was at war with himself. A terrible temptation was before him. On the one side was his upright nature, and on the other his love for his helpless wife and child. Unconsciously he passed onwards until he reached his home.

In his own room once more, Oswald took out the pocket-book and examined its exterior carefully. Then he opened it and drew forth twenty pounds in notes and a few small silver coins.

He surveyed the treasure with startled eyes and murmured,—

"It is a fortune; such a sum would tide us over our present difficulties, and with Edith strong again, I could once more try for work."

Then he threw the money on the table, crying,—

"I will not be tempted; I will not imperil my soul; I will return it!"

He half turned as if to carry his purpose into instant execution, but suddenly remembered he had no means of tracing the owner. As the thought occurred to him, he once more examined the pocket-book, but despite himself, he could not help feeling relieved when he found neither name nor address.

Stay! In his hurry he has overlooked the ticket pocket. What is in it? A card! He draws it out, and in astonishment reads, "Mr. George Morley, 25, Belmont-square."

"What!" he cried. "This is indeed miraculous. My father's friend, the man who owed so much to him. Surely the hand of Heaven is in all this! I will go to him. He will help me, for my father's sake. Ah! but will he? Did I not write to him some months ago? Did I not open my soul to him, and yet he has not even deigned to reply to me. Alas! my last hope is dead. Doubtless he will take his money, and let me and my darlings starve. Yet no, by Heaven! it shall not be. For myself I care nothing, but they shall not suffer. Let the sin and its consequences be mine, and mine alone. I will keep what Heaven has given into my hand."

He paced the room excitedly, still dragged first this way, then that by conflicting emotions, till he was roused by the entrance of his landlady.

She paused as she noticed the strange, stern look on the clergyman's face. Then, standing by the open door she said,—

"I'm very sorry to trouble you, Mr. Campion; I'm sure it grieves me sorely to think of your good lady ill upstairs, but I am in great straits myself, and if I don't get some money I'm sure I don't know what will become of us."

The young man looked at the woman gravely as he answered,—

"You have been more than kind to us, Mrs. Martin; you have helped us when you were ill able to do so, and, believe me, I am not ungrateful. Is your present need so very great?"

"Indeed it is, sir. You know I'm a widow with no one to help me, and now the grocer says he won't leave any more provisions without the money; and the landlord has just called for the

rent, and declares he'll have me ejected to-morrow."

"Will five pounds be sufficient for your wants?" said Campion, quietly.

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir—more than enough," answered the woman, her face brightening.

"Heaven be merciful to me and pardon my sin!" said the clergyman to himself; "I cannot let this woman and her little ones suffer on my account; the temptation is too great." Then, aloud: "Take your money, Mrs. Martin; there is plenty on the table."

As his landlady stepped forward, he turned to the window so that she could not see his face, for he feared that his emotion would betray itself.

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Mrs. Martin, as she picked up a five pound note. "I'm truly glad to see you with so much, as much for yours and your dear wife's sake as for my own." Then, as he did not speak, she withdrew quietly.

Campion turned from the window, trembling violently.

"Thus," he cried, "are my fetters forged. Now there is no escape!" Then he added, bitterly, "I am fit to be neither saint nor sinner. As I have fallen, at least let me face my crime like a man. I have lost my soul, I will take its price as my reward, and behave like a man, not like a weak-minded boy."

He gathered up the rest of the money, and without waiting to give himself time for further reflection ran upstairs to his wife's room.

The young mother was awake, and received him with a look of love. She noticed at once his excited face, and gently drawing him toward her, said,—

"Have you had good fortune, dear?"

"Yes," he replied, cheerfully. "Indeed I have; see here!" and he showed her the notes.

The young woman's face flushed with pleasure. Not for a moment did any possible suspicion of his honesty enter her mind. She trusted him to the fullest extent, and was too weak to question how he had become possessed of so much.

She kissed his face as he bent over her, and murmured,—

"I am so thankful, Oswald. Now I can go to sleep comfortably; to-morrow you shall tell me all about your wonderful good luck."

Someone tapped gently at the door. The nurse came over to him, and whispered,—

"You are wanted, sir."

He arose quietly, and, with one fond glance at his sleeping wife, descended the stairs. Then he underwent a sudden revulsion of feeling. He pictured to himself that the police were waiting for him to charge him with theft. Before his mind rose a vision of his denunciation by the owner of the lost pocket-book, and in a state of nervous agitation he laid his hand on the handle of the sitting-room door.

As the clergyman paused irresolutely at the door, Mrs. Martin handed him a card; but his head swam so much that, in the dull light, he in vain tried to read it. Mastering his emotion, he flung open the door, and, with the card still in his hand, entered the room.

He stopped and almost staggered back, as he saw a short, stout gentleman standing with his back to the fire. Instinctively he recognized the owner of the pocket-book, and an intense horror took possession of him.

His crime had found him out full soon, and, with the desperation of despair, he advanced like a culprit to his doom. But as the mists cleared from his eyes he saw that his visitor's face did not bear the look of an avenging Nemesis. His mouth was parted with a genial smile, and the soft eyes shone with good humour.

The stranger sprang forward as he saw the clergyman, and grasping the young man's hands in his, said, in a voice quivering with excitement,—

"My young friend, I am delighted to find you at last. Believe me, this is a happy meeting to me."

Dumbfounded at his unexpected reception, Campion was silent for a moment; then he exclaimed, in a stiff manner, the better to conceal his agitation:

"Sir, I am at a disadvantage. I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"What!" said the other, in surprise. "You have my card in your hand. Do you not recognise the name? I am George Morley, your father's friend!"

"True, true," murmured the clergyman, absently; "but what has that to do with me?"

"Surely you are not well. What has it to do with you? I intend it shall have a great deal to do with you. Besides, did you not write and confide in me?"

"Yes, but that was long ago. You did not answer my letter."

"Now look here, young man! don't be too ready to take umbrage. Your letter only reached me two days ago, when I returned from Germany. You gave me your address at Bedford, and a nice hunt I've had to find you. I went down there at once, but your late pastor couldn't tell me your present place of residence. I've been looking for you ever since, and had almost given up in despair, when, not an hour ago, I luckily thought of Pearson; he knows all the parsons, and, by a curious coincidence, he said you had only just left him; in fact, your card was still on his desk; so I came on at once."

"Did Mr. Pearson tell you why I had called on him, and how he received me?"

"I don't remember that he said anything special; but he mentioned you were looking for work, though I don't know whether that's quite a correct word to use with respect to a clergyman's duties."

"And why have you sought me out now?" asked Campion, huskily, his intense feeling making him brusque and almost discourteous.

"Oh, look here, Campion," said Morley, rising, "your whys and wherefores are getting too much for me. Don't you know your father helped me very materially in my early days, and now I want to do something to repay the debt."

"And how can you tell that his son deserves your assistance?" Then springing to his feet he cried: "I cannot, dare not tell you why, but you shall not help me; I am unworthy of it!"

Then he sank down on a chair and buried his face in his hands and groaned in anguish. "If I had but waited!" he thought. "Had I but resisted temptation for one short hour, all would have been well, and I should have been an honest man. Now, I can never hold up my head again."

Morley stood looking at the young man for a moment in silence, then he gently approached him, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said, kindly:

"Campion, for your father's sake you must let me help you. Whatever wrong you have done, or think you have done, need not affect the question. You are over-wrought, and doubtless exaggerate matters. But, be that as it may, whether your fault is real or imaginary, it is not against me."

Campion once more sprang from his chair, and, facing his visitor, cried out, as though the words were wrung from him by torture:

"You! Yes, it is against you and God, that I have sinned. Did you not lose your pocket-book to-day?"

"Yes, I did; but how do you know that?"

"I saw you drop it. I picked it up. I, that you have imagined honest and upright, have stolen your money and paid my debts with it."

"But you did not know to whom it belonged?"

"I did. Your card was in the pocket-book."

"Ah!"

"I see," said the clergyman, almost with relief, "now you appreciate the true character of the man you offer to assist. Go, call in the police, and give me up to justice."

Morley's face became overcast, and a look of deep sorrow settled upon it. He sat in silence for a few moments, that seemed an age to the man cowering before him. Then he said in an authoritative yet kind voice:

"Campion, I am an old man and your father's friend. I beseech of you to look on me as standing in his place, and tell me all about this sad affair. Do not seek either to condemn or excuse yourself, but tell me the tale simply, and as straightforwardly as though you were speaking of another."

Thus abjured, the young man described in

detail the doings of the day, in a voice often broken by his agitation. He did not seek to palliate his offence, but his narrative showed how circumstances had combined to urge him into dishonesty.

The elder man listened to him attentively, but in silence, then, as he concluded, he took his hands in his, and said:

"My poor friend, your tale has greatly moved me. Believe me, the money is of no importance to me, but I dare not ask you to look lightly on your sin. You used the hard term theft for your act, but I do not think it is that. I am not a lawyer, but I imagine the law has a milder term for such offence. However that may be, now, more than ever, I claim my right to help you. If you accept my assistance, a useful career is before you, and your error will serve as an incentive to future work. Then I ask you to think of your young wife and helpless child; surely they appeal strongly to you to take the help I offer you."

"You heap coals of fire on my head," murmured the young man in broken accents.

The two men sat talking far into the evening, and when Morley rose to leave he had gained his point. The young clergyman had learned the lesson that oftentimes appears so hard to believe, that if Heaven is willing to forgive, it is meet that man should not condemn himself too severely, and should accept human forgiveness if fully and freely offered.

The Rev. Oswald Campion is now a well-known preacher. He holds the pastorate of a church in a county town and his preaching has drawn a large congregation around him. It is not his eloquence or rhetorical display that affects his hearers, for he speaks in simple language, as an erring man to fellow-men liable to fall into temptation, and the sincerity of his words none can dispute. His early error has impressed his soul, and he never tires of preaching the doctrines of mercy and forgiveness.

POOR LITTLE LINNET.

—101—

CHAPTER VIII.

STANDING there upon the bearskin mat in the library doorway, and framed, so to say, in the oaken woodwork of it, Derrick Bourdillon, dark and satanic-looking, reminded Linnet forcibly of a certain picture of a Sicilian bandit which she had once looked at with dislike and terror in the days when she was a little child.

The Earl took off his wet slouched cloth hat and flung it over his shoulder into the hall; the dripping overcoat followed, which he wrenched from his back unassisted.

He next favoured Linnet with a straight stare and a sullen bow, before advancing further into the apartment where she stood.

The light now fell fully upon the dark worn face of the man—so worn and sunken it seemed where the cheeks were not hidden by the crisp swart beard—and the young girl as it were involuntarily fixed her gaze upon that countenance, and for several moments, in the first shock of her amazement, kept it there unflinchingly.

For she had listened to so much concerning him beforehand; and now at last he was actually before her in the flesh!

Over his haggard white forehead the soft black hair had fallen dankly, all damped by the rain and roughened by the wind.

A restless, reckless, wild sort of gleam burned in his sombre eyes, which were, oh, so like the poor Countess's, thought Linnet half unconsciously. They must have been eyes beautiful enough once upon a time; but they were blood-shot and too deeply-set now beneath their straight, strong brows.

A haughty, bold, dissolute face it was, decided Linnet, with the beauty of the clear-cut features marred sorely by the traces of fiendish passions let loose and unrestrained.

Wrapped as she had seen him first in the

heavy travelling-coat, his fine figure then had looked markedly square and stalwart; but, divested of that garment in question, the girl saw now that it was far otherwise.

There was still of course the powerful frame, the outline of admirable Herculean proportions; but about the Earl's broad chest and shoulders in particular it was not difficult to discern that the clothes fitted ill, because of the substance which had fallen away beneath them.

In height he was some inches taller than Gordon Noble, the loyal friend to whom he owed so much; and though their years in number were probably much the same, Derrick Bourdillon, so to say, must have lived twice as long as the other, judging from the satiety, unrest, and utter weariness of all earthly things and experiences which were written there in the furrows of his brow.

Linnet quivered in every limb as the Earl approached her; and perhaps her real unconquerable dread of Derrick Bourdillon dated from that self-same moment.

"Pray who are you, may I ask?" he said at last brusquely. "I cannot remember ever before having had the honour of seeing you here at the Abbey—have I?"

Somehow Linnet could not answer him; and confused, bewildered, and trembling still, she sank weakly down on the chair lately occupied by good Mrs. Kidd.

That worthy soul, compassionating the young girl's distress, now ventured timidly in from out of the hall shadows, where she had been hovering, uncertain how to proceed, until she should receive her instructions from her brusquely-spoken master.

"Oh, your lordship, I ought to tell you," began Mrs. Kidd respectfully, "this young lady, your lordship, is Miss Lethbridge, the Countess's—"

"Thank you, Kidd," he interposed, turning and frowning so abruptly upon the well-meaning dame that she retreated rather hastily from his vicinity. "You will be good enough to see that my old rooms are properly attended to immediately. My baggage will be here shortly, I have no doubt. You may go."

And Mrs. Kidd went; and glad she seemed of her dismissal. As for Linnet, left alone with the terrible stranger, she felt sorely inclined to scream and call back Mrs. Kidd, and beseech her not to leave her thus with the Countess's reprobate son.

As the library door closed and shut them in together, Derrick Bourdillon seated himself opposite to Linnet, and kicked savagely at a glowing log which protruded slightly from the andirons over the hearthstone.

The moisture from his boot hissed as it dropped amongst the embers; and then looking up quickly at the moment, he caught Linnet furtively watching his movements.

"And you, then, I take it, are the Miss Lethbridge whom at some time or another I fancy now I must have heard of?" he remarked indifferently. "May I inquire whether you are living here, Miss Lethbridge—here at the Abbey with my mother?"

And again he struck the log with his heel, and sent the sparks in thousands eddying up the gullet of the chimney.

"Yes," she stammered shyly, yet resenting inwardly his general tone and air towards her. "I live here with Lady Bourdillon now, who is generous enough to give me a home. I am quite alone in the world, and have no shelter in it save for Dreadmere Abbey. I came here only two days ago in fact, and feel a total stranger everywhere at present, not yet having had time to get used to things. Yes," she went on precipitately in her nervousness, and scarcely knowing what she said, "I am Miss Lethbridge, generally called Linnet, and the Countess is my godmother. And now," she concluded, rising hastily from her chair and harbouring dim notions of fleeing straightway to the seclusion and safety of Mrs. Kidd's quarters, feeling so little at ease in the presence of Derrick Bourdillon, "and now, if you please, I will say good-night. I—"

"What?" he exclaimed suddenly.

"I am thinking of—of—of going to bed," stammered out Linnet.

"What," he said again coolly—"at nine o'clock! Truly you keep good hours, Miss Lethbridge! However, in honour of my arrival, will not you sit up just a little later this evening? Don't desert me, I pray. Please go back to your seat."

His tone was undisguisedly a so-filing, quizzing one, and yet Linnet somehow found not the strength of will to resist and disobey him.

So angry with herself, and angrier still with him, she meekly returned to her chair and sat down again.

"I think, Lord Bourdillon," she said, almost impatiently, "it would be wise of you if you were to change at once those clothes you have on. See how they are steaming! I am sure it is dreadfully wrong of you to sit there and dry them in that fashion."

"You are exceedingly kind and thoughtful, Miss Lethbridge. But I do not particularly care about changing until my luggage has come up from the station. Believe me, it is not of the slightest consequence. However, if I may," with a half-mocking bow towards Linnet, "I'll ring for a brandy and soda."

"A big one," said Lord Bourdillon gruffly to the quaking Phoebe, when she appeared in answer to the vigorous summons.

And Phoebe was prompt to vanish on her errand and perform the bidding of the master of the house.

"But surely," exclaimed Linnet in dismay, "you never walked all the way from Agglestone station in the rain!"

"Yes, why not? Owing to the vile weather, the fumes, I imagine, did not consider it worth their while to meet the trains to-night. A well-disposed official, however, volunteered to procure me a vehicle of some sort, but I was impatient to get on. I chose to walk rather than wait an indefinite time perhaps in that beastly hole of a station—I beg your pardon of course. And, besides, the walk is nothing; though the roads were anything but delightful, I assure you."

"What could you expect them to be on a night like this?" suggested Linnet quietly.

"Why in the world does not he inquire for the Countess?" she thought unobtrusively.

How amazed would Lady Bourdillon be to find him at the Abbey on her return. How her yearning heart would rejoice and overflow at the sight of this idolized son, whom at that very moment, doubtless, she was thinking of, and weeping over secretly, as one in hiding from disgrace and his fellow men.

Ah, was it indeed to put himself in hiding that he had fled that night to Dreadmere Abbey?

"Lord Bourdillon," said little Linnet, speaking very fast and nervously in the displeasure she felt at his apparent want of heart and feeling, "why do you not inquire after your mother?"

His haggard, bearded profile, those dark weary eyes of his, were turned thoughtfully on the fire.

For a whole minute or more he made no reply to Linnet's challenge; but with his legs crossed, and his chin and folded arms resting on his breast, he smiled presently.

And then it was that Linnet thought involuntarily of those impressive lines of Byron's in speaking of his *Corair*—

"There was a laughing devil in his sneer
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope, withering, fled, and many sighed farewell."

So, thinking, Linnet spoke up bravely once more—

"You do not answer me," she cried, with a touch of impatience again.

The smile on his face grew less cynical—less hard. His features seemed to soften indeed, and that smile became infinitely sad.

"If I do not inquire for her, Miss Lethbridge," he said with singular gentleness, his eyes still fixed on the fire, "it is because I can give a tolerably accurate guess as to where she is at the present moment. She is with the Nobles at Windyaste. The instant I missed her dear face on the threshold, I knew that she must be there. Am I not right?"

Linnet nodded, and drew a long breath—his breath almost of thankfulness and relief.

The conviction which for the past day or so had been forcing itself strongly upon her mind, was now shaken—weakened considerably.

She began to reflect in a more charitable spirit—with more justice.

Derrick Bourdillon, then, at least loved his mother; and—Heaven forgive her!—Linnet had believed differently.

Yes, whatever his crimes, whatever his sins against her might be, he evidently loved his mother after his own fashion.

"She would not have gone to Windyaste of course," said Linnet gravely, curious in no slight degree to learn how he might accept the observation, "had she known that you were coming to the Abbey this evening."

"So! And why, pray, did you not accompany my mother, Miss Lethbridge?" he retorted, evasively, with a quiet, though perceptible sneer. "You were not included in the invitation, I presume."

"Indeed I was," flashed out the poor child, wrathfully, "only—only you trust know—Oh, Lord Bourdillon. Gracious goodness me!"

And in overwhelming confusion and dismay, Linnet clapped her little brown hands to either side of her head.

In the novelty and amazement of the past half hour she had forgotten entirely her unlovely counterpane—the swollen cheek, the flannel bandage, the shabby old black flowered silk shawl, in short the hideous *tout ensemble* which she must all along have presented, to his secret amusement and diversion doubtless.

And, in her shame and bitter vexation of the moment, observing him in the very act of striving to maintain a due gravity of expression, she absolutely forgot her fear of him likewise.

"You have guessed—you have known from the very beginning the simple obvious reason of my being here at home at the Abbey all alone, and not with the Countess at Windyaste," Linnet went on in hot reproach. "Why could not you be generous enough, Lord Bourdillon, to remind me of my ridiculous plight, which you must have clearly seen that I myself had forgotten," she cried unreasonably. "In kindness to me—"

"Believe me," he tried to put in.

But Linnet would not hear.

"In kindness and mainly courtesy to me," she stopped him half fearfully, "you should have reminded me at once. I understand now, of course, why a little time back you would not let me go. You have been sitting there opposite to me all this long while quietly making fun of me. You would not let me go when I wished to, because just then you had not sufficiently enjoyed the joke. Of course that was it—I see it all now," concluded Linnet, and this time she sprang to her feet both determinedly and indignantly.

"On, my honour—no!" Derrick Bourdillon told her, seriously and emphatically. "You are mistaken, Miss Lethbridge, believe me, and wrong me grievously. And as to reminding any lady that she is unfortunately an object for compassion, a victim to circumstances over which she has no control—"

"Oh, please say no more; it doesn't so much really matter, after all, I suppose," she interrupted him, resignedly. "Good night, Lord Bourdillon."

And she held out her hand to him, longing to be gone from his presence.

He, too, then rose, and stood there with his back to the fire.

Linnet was restless, and sorely ill at ease.

She hated the idea of those dark, deep eyes gazing down upon the crown of her head, where figured conspicuously a big homely safety-pin of Mrs. Kidd's, which kept the flannel bandage together.

She hated the idea of his lips, all hidden in the crisp black beard, sneering down upon her, perhaps, the flimsy sneer which she felt that they could assume at will.

He seemed in no hurry to take within his own the little proffered brown hand; and as for Linnet herself, she wholly lacked just then the courage to raise her eyes to his face.

"I am really going now, Lord Bourdillon," she said quietly, turning from him as she spoke. "Once more, good-night."

"I presume," he remarked, with odious, quizzical slowness of speech, disregarding utterly her parting words—and Linnet could not tell whether he was smiling or not—"I presume that my mother deputed you, hostess, Miss Lethbridge, in her unavoidable absence from the Abbey? Granted that so, allow me to congratulate you upon the really admirable and most hospitable manner in which you discharge the duties of the post."

"You are talking nonsense, Lord Bourdillon," cried Linnet warmly, nettled at the implied rebuke, whether it was meant in jest or otherwise. "You are in your own house—you are master here. What am I?"

He laughed out then; and Linnet held up her small head, not without dignity, she hoped.

"You could order your brandy-and-soda just now," said she, "and, therefore, had you so willed, you might have ordered anything else you required. Lady Bourdillon expected no guests, consequently no responsibility whatever, as hostess, devolves upon me in her absence."

He laughed again as if much amused at her spirit; but this time Linnet took no notice.

She had already reached the door, when it was opened suddenly from without; and, to Linnet's inexpressible relief, Lady Bourdillon entered, and she—Linnet—was free to escape.

The Countess had kept her promise, and had returned early to the Abbey.

Shut up there together, in the dim old library, with a tempestuous wild night outside, they had failed to catch the sound of the wheels of the returning chariot out in the front upon the wet mossed gravel.

It was evident that the Countess had been apprised of her son's arrival.

Her whole demeanour, with its suppressed excitement, the deep, passionate love shining forth in her eyes through the glad heavy tears which dimmed them, told plainly that she was yearning to fold him on her breast. The only son of his mother, and she a widow! She a widow, and he a prodigal! Saddest of all sad words!

Linnet would not see the meeting between the two.

As the Countess entered hurriedly, the girl slipped noiselessly out, shutting the door upon them, and thus leaving them alone together.

It was the better way.

Hastening down the chief corridor on her way to bed, Linnet passed the rooms of Derrick Bourdillon.

His luggage had come, and the footman was just carrying a portmanteau into the dressing-room.

Outside the door a heavy-looking travelling bag was lying, with a written label fastened to the straps.

Linnet stooped curiously and perused the inscription; and then she knew that Derrick, Earl Bourdillon, had indeed arrived at Dreadmere Abbey as one seeking hiding and sanctuary—as one going in fear of his country's laws.

The railway label ran thus:—

MR. DUNCAN BROWN,
Passenger to Agglestone.

So he had travelled under a false name. And now, no matter what his debts and misdeeds, he was safe in his own home for the present.

Linnet learned from Mrs. Kidd afterwards that this was by no means the first occasion that Lord Bourdillon had resorted to a plan of the kind—by no means the first time that the railway officials at Agglestone station had forwarded to the Abbey luggage belonging to the master of the house, yet bearing an alien name.

Linnet pitied the Countess, her poor god-mother, from the bottom of her warm young heart.

In her bed that night Linnet thought it all over for a long while before she could close her eyes, smiling feebly to herself at the disquieting recollection of their rather singular introduction to each other.

And she trembled, too, for all the pain and distress which the future might hold in store for her dear friend Lady Bourdillon.

Sleep she could not, tossing and rolling from side to side; and when at length Linnet did succeed in falling into a doze, it was only to dream disturbing dreams—horrid, nervous, senseless dreams—whereof the theme and subject was always Lord Bourdillon.

Once, she thought, in the garb and cowl of a monk he was lying cold and dead, stretched at full length in the desolate chapel ruins, with the pallid moonlight on his upturned face and on his black, dew-damp hair.

The hateful sneer and disbelief in all human good were even in death discernible there on it too; though the attitude of his form was one of perfect peace, and the dark-lashed eyes were firmly closed.

Whilst the old bell in the belfry-room, cordless and ghostly, amid the moon-splashed ivy high above his head, proclaimed his death to the world he had left, wayworn and weary of it all!

With the welcome morning light, however, Linnet had a good deal to think about; and, far better still, no faceache to trouble her.

CHAPTER IX.

LINETT saw scarcely anything of Derrick Bourdillon for some few days after his arrival at the Abbey; for he was shut up much in the society of his friend Gordon Noble, his stately, silver-haired mother, and a lawyer from London—not the family solicitor, Mr. Quale; he lived near in Agglestone.

No, this man, who called himself a lawyer, and who evidently came to the Abbey on Derrick Bourdillon's business, was a lean Jew-like individual, with not over-clean nails and linen, dingy black attire, and obsequious manners.

Linnet had never spoken to him; but they used to meet out-of-doors occasionally.

He had lodgings, she believed, somewhere or other in Agglestone, and he used to trudge over with his papers and black bag every day to Dreadmere Abbey, and frequently Mr. Quale himself had accompanied this dingy person from London.

Seeing very little either of the Countess, too, at that time, Linnet doubtless would have found things very dull and lonely, had it not been for Irene Noble, who, if not cheering the young girl's solitude at the quiet old Abbey across the park, would insist upon Linnet's lightening the burden of her own loneliness over at Windygate, where, all by herself now, she missed Gordon so sadly—the twin-brother whose companionship was everything to Irene.

A week passed away slowly; and at length there came a day when Gordon Noble and the dingy Jewish man went away from the Abbey together—back to London, Irene said—but Derrick Bourdillon remained at home with the Countess.

On the following day Gordon returned alone; and with his return affairs at the Abbey seemed to brighten greatly. Linnet noticed; a less troubled atmosphere appeared to surround them, and everyone seemed to breathe more freely now that the man in dingy black had gone away.

Certainly the Countess's clear white face looked far less stern and sorrowful; and in the dark bearded countenance of the Earl, so worn and haggard beyond its years, Linnet thought that she could detect something—perhaps it was relief—that assuredly was not there, on that memorable evening when he had stolen home to the place of his birth like a thief under cover of night.

The feverish, reckless light in the deep, dark eyes was gradually fading out; the tranquillity born of mental ease shone quietly in them instead—a visible sense as it were of freedom and rest.

"But how long will it last!" Linnet asked herself fearfully.

And she knew that she was not the only one in whose mind that self-same question was ever uppermost.

How long would he be able to content himself with the sweet home monotony of the Abbey, all apart from the life which he had for years been

accustomed to lead, and the wild, dissipated companions from whom, it would seem, he had so lately broken!

Perhaps they would track him to the sanctuary and haven he had found by his own hearth and with the mother who worshipped him, and by the force of dangerous flattery, by the aid perchance of intolerable ridicule, seduce him back to the old bad life and the pursuits he had been compelled to flee!

Or would he drift away once more to it all, of his own unfettered will, wearying of the uneventful sameness of the quiet home, as he had wearied of it often before?

"He has promised me oh, so faithfully, oh, so earnestly, that he will amend and lead a better life," the Countess whispered to Linnet with happy tears in her eyes, on the day after Gordon Noble's return from town, when she and her young god-daughter chanced to be alone together; "and with all my heart and soul I pray that he may keep his word! His debts now have all been settled to the uttermost farthing; and Gordon explains that, for the future, he—Derrick—will necessarily be much the poorer for the sacrifice; but that of course cannot be helped."

"And even that might be altered and bettered considerably in a few years' time, if Derrick will only keep his promise and stay with me and care for me always here."

"Oh, Linnet, I think he will! He seems so truly in earnest about it this time. He has had lately such a bitter, bitter lesson. And besides," said the Countess nervously, "his health, he himself confesses, is not what it used to be—far from it. Yes, he says that he will reform, Linnet, and—and so I mean to trust him again."

Trust him again!

Had she not trusted in him blindly times without number, and had not he hitherto ever repaid that faithful trust with the most careless and selfish treachery!

Nevertheless the Countess was prepared to believe in him once more, oblivious alike of all past experience and the wayward disposition of the sinner.

Had not his heartless conduct and blackened reputation rendered him odious in the eyes of all who knew him—alienated, as he was, from his neighbours and equals, and by his inferiors shunned and feared!

Had not dark whispers, perhaps not dark enough, and perhaps on the other hand exaggerated—who shall say which!—concerning his evil career, and the wild lawless spirits who shared in it, from time to time found their way down to the neighbourhood of Dreadmere, ever since his college days and his father's death!

Was not his character all too ill established, and irrevocable judgment passed on him long ago!

How often in the awful stillness of the slowly-dragging night, very humbly, and with all her soul in her uplifted voice, as though forsooth the sin were her own, had not the Countess prayed aloud for her son's redemption, growing tired and sick with useless waiting, as it would seem, for the answer which never came to those passionate supplications—prayers so full of quiet agony and dreadful sorrow that all else save the erring one was unremembered in her great humiliation and intercession with Heaven!

And yet, truly mother-like, in her strong, great love for him, she was about to trust him again!

For now the time was come at last when she believed that her weary pleadings were in truth rewarded.

Derrick Bourdillon had seen in the end the grievous error of his ways; and after long years of pain and patience all would be well.

What Gordon Noble himself thought of the Earl's swift reformation, or rather present good intentions, Linnet could not tell; but in Irene's beautiful, sorrowful eyes she discerned as it were the reflection of her own doubts and fears, and well understood, though nothing on the point was ever said between them, that Irene was as mistrustful and unconvinced as she—Linnet—was herself.

It was curious to observe how careful was Irene always to avoid all mention of his name—

how little interested she appeared in anything relative to the doings at Dreadmere Abbey, during the time that those long monotonous "business-days" were dragging out their weary length at the silent old house.

But Linnet, to whom her secrets had been revealed unwittingly, saw from the melancholy which marked her lovely face that the heart of Irene was heavy.

She frequently caught herself wondering, when alone, whether there might be anything of a settled nature between Miss Noble and the prodigal Lord Bourdillon?

They had known each other, it was true, from childhood; but of late years they had been almost as strangers.

Since the night of his undreamed-of home-coming, to Linnet's certain knowledge there had not been more than a dozen ordinary words exchanged on either side.

Certainly, if a mutual attachment existed between the pair, it was remarkable for its simplicity and quiet bearing.

In the after years it came to Linnet's knowledge that the neighbourhood had indeed been in the habit of asking here and there how it was that the beautiful Irene Noble remained unwedded.

Yet, freely as those busybodies talked and speculated amongst themselves, they ever failed to discover the true reason they were in quest of.

"She is getting on, you know," one would say, "six-and-twenty—exactly her brother's age. How odd, is it not, that with her beauty, she is Irene Noble still!"

But for all her suitors alike Irene had but one answer; an answer admitting of no hope; and they were not few who sought in marriage the gentle hand of Gordon Noble's lovely twin-sister.

Did Gordon himself, Linnet wondered sometimes, comprehend these apparently inexplicable refusals on the part of Irene? She fancied somehow that he did; for in all his dealings with her he was very tender, just as though they perfectly, yet tacitly, understood each other.

One bright autumnal-tinted afternoon, when Derrick Bourdillon's arrival at the Abbey dated some ten days back in the past, and when nearly a fortnight had elapsed since Linnet's own advent in the Abbey circle, she walked into Agglestone on an errand for the Countess.

It was only to purchase some knitting-cotton, for the temporary lack of which Lady Bourdillon had declared herself distressed.

So Linnet started on her walk, and reached home again some few minutes before five o'clock.

She found the Countess, and delivered up her small parcel.

"The Nobles will be with us this evening to dine, Linnet dear," was Lady Bourdillon's greeting. "Gordon has been over to see Derrick, but I believe he has left now. He has gone to fetch Irene."

"Has he, dear godmother!" said Linnet, brightly. "Then I will go at once and make myself presentable."

She left the room where the Countess sat, and mounted the wide dim stairs. She knew of two ways now by which she could reach her bed-chamber. The one lay through the picture-gallery, the other was by way of the south corridor.

As a rule Linnet shunned the pictured route—it seemed always so vast and dusky.

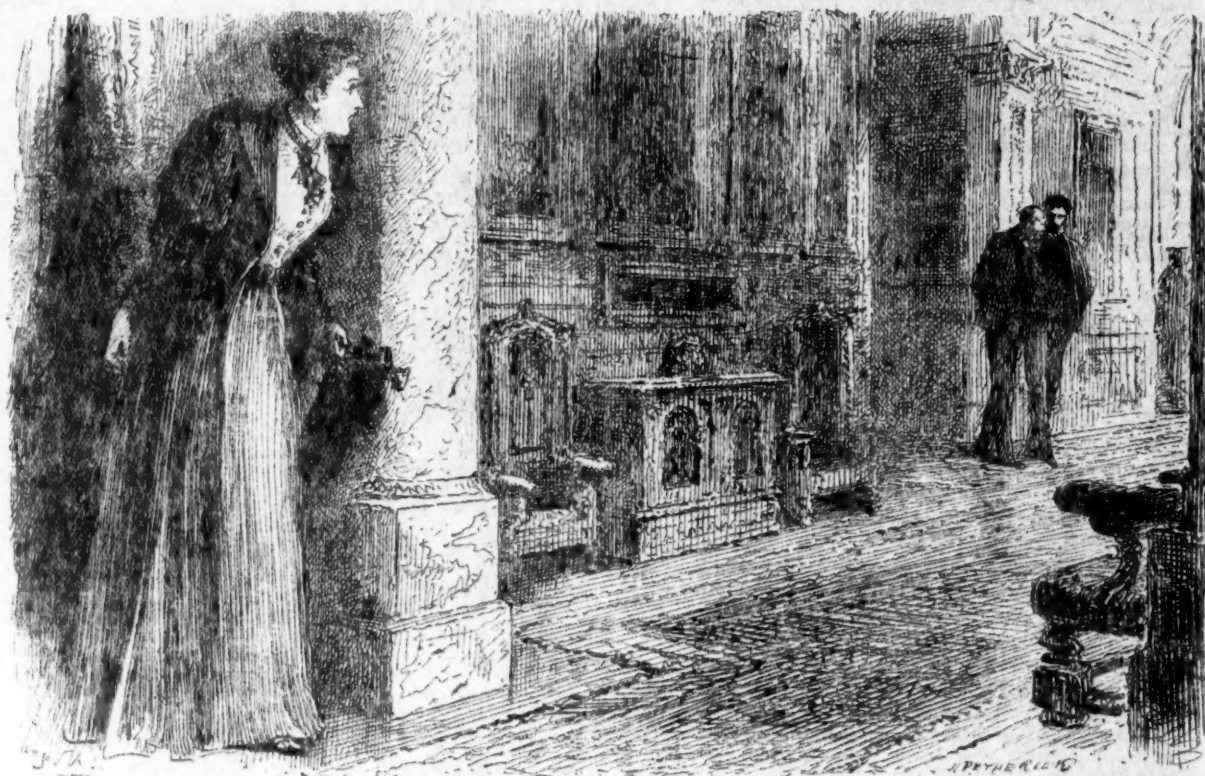
But this afternoon she chose it mechanically, swinging her hat in her hand by a ribbon as she went, and humming the fragment of a tune.

The gallery ran partly on the western side of the Abbey, extending at an angle towards the north.

The arched doorway at Linnet's end, rather to her astonishment she found to be open, which was unusual. She had but to pull aside the sweeping old faded tapestry curtain, and then might enter.

But she did not. She paused suddenly, halting on the threshold.

The fading light, tinged with the beams of the setting sun, slanted tremulously through one of



LINNET WATCHED AND LISTENED TO THE TWO MEN WITH BREATHLESS INTEREST.

the half-stained windows at the farther end where the gallery widened.

In the deep recess of this window stood two tall Mandarin jars.

In some places the shadows were sombre in the extreme; in others they were tinted gorgeously by the light from the coloured windows.

Here and there the great gilt frames shone brightly out of the dusk, but the paintings themselves looked black and unmeaning in the fast-gathering autumn gloom, which was stealing through and filling the vast picture-gallery with mists which were almost impenetrable.

Pacing leisurely by the great pictures, arm linked in arm, Linnet saw Gordon Noble and Derrick Bourdillon, their footsteps muffled by the rich old carpet, but their voices on the evening dusk sounding singularly distinct.

Just where the tinted dying daylight slanted in fully upon them, they came to a standstill, and Linnet, in her amazement at beholding them thus together, in that still unfrequented place, and at that quiet hour, watched them breathlessly—watched and listened deliberately, with the tapestry curtain in her hand—for three or four consecutive minutes, indeed, before she recollected what she was about, and crept away on tiptoe from the spot, ashamed of her eaves-dropping there.

Gordon's fair head, as he was standing, almost rested on the shoulder of Derrick Bourdillon.

The Earl was speaking, his voice somehow sounding very clear and gentle through the silent gloaming of the place.

"Where should I have been, dear old man," he was saying, "but for you? Where would my dear mother have found herself, I wonder? Gordon," very sadly "I owe in fact everything to you. You have been to me more than friend—more than brother, as I have told you hundreds of times. I wish, however, that you would trust me this time, Gordon—will you?"

"Anything I have done for you, Bourdillon," Gordon made answer, "has been done for our long friendship's sake. In the face of all I will stand

by you and act for you while I live; but—but you know—"

"But to put faith in me ever again, old fellow, is more than difficult, eh?" said the other, gently and sadly still.

"Yes—just a little difficult," was Gordon Noble's reply. "You will make me speak, you know."

"Gordon," cried the prodigal, then, with strange humility for him, "Well do I know that my life hitherto has been a wasted life—a life thrown away. I know and feel deeply the shame and sorrow I have caused. The bitterness of the knowledge has well-nigh killed me in remorseful moments. But Gordon, dear old fellow, I want now to swear to you that I will never again desert my mother. In all my reckless, sinful past I have never once sworn that. Yes, I know—I have promised often enough; but I have never pledged you my oath. But I do so now. Gordon, hear me, I say!"

"Ah no, no! Far better not!"

"Hear me!" cried Bourdillon, passionately. And then the two men turned and faced each other in the deepening shadows, each clasping the outstretched hand of the other.

Linnet, waiting to see and hear no more, let the curtain slip noiselessly from her hand, and fled with a guilty feeling fluttering in her breast.

"With Heaven's help and blessing I do think that he will remain firm this time," she whispered hopefully to herself.

"Oh, that he may do so for his mother's sake! I will try to be more charitable and less distrustful of him for the future."

And then for the first time the solution to the riddle of Gordon Noble's wonderful kindness and service to the Bourdillons began to dawn on the mind of Linnet.

It was because of the love that he bore towards the prodigal son that he had watched over and attended so unselfishly and so unweariedly to the personal interests of the desolate mother.

Although he could not entirely hinder Lord Bourdillon in spending and squandering that

which was his own by natural birthright, he could do and had already done much towards preserving the Countess from the absolute ruin which, but for his—Gordon's—exertions and intervention must inevitably, sooner or later, have overtaken her in her old age.

Linnet had never possessed a very clear head for business things of the kind; but the day came, later on, when Gordon himself made her understand it all clearly enough.

And then she wondered, more than ever, at his goodness and wisdom and skill.

Until that evening when she had come by mere chance upon the two men in the picture gallery, Linnet had never once suspected that the friendship between them was of so deep and strong a nature.

Notwithstanding his sins and his evil courses, it seemed then that Gordon Noble really loved this Lord Bourdillon—that, in spite of everything, he would stand by him and fight for him to the end.

That evening, when the two sauntered in from the dining-room to join the ladies, they found Irene and the Countess knitting by the fire together, and Linnet in a remote corner by herself fingering idly the keys of a neglected old spinet.

Derrick Bourdillon came over to where she was sitting, and spoke at once with that new gentleness of tone and manner, which, to Linnet, at any rate, appeared so passing strange at present.

She could not forget that night of his arrival when he had come to the Abbey in the wind and the rain, scaring her out of her wits.

She had found him so different then; and so even now, recollecting, she glanced up at him half affrightedly.

(To be continued.)

THE officials of Korea wear upon their hats the figures of various birds and animals.



"BERYL, UNCLE SAID I WAS TO COME TO YOU FOR MY ANSWER," SAID KENNETH, IN A LOW MOVING TONE.

STEPCHILDREN OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRE was one of those mansions which rich London merchants delight to build at an easy distance from the metropolis, so that they may indulge in rural delights and yet be only forty minutes or so railway journey from their office.

It was exactly the style of house you may see by the dozen at Sydenham, Beckenham, and Chislehurst, being, in fact, only a short distance from the latter place.

It had stabling for half-a-dozen horses, a viney, a pinery, a piggery, a lawn tennis court, an orchard, a rosary, and a large kitchen garden, in fact, everything that money could procure, and which could be compressed within the space of a few acres.

Mr. Hunter was wont to say jocularly that he had gone a little beyond the demand of his radical friends for three acres and a cow, since the Fire with its grounds occupied just over four acres, and he boasted not one cow but two.

He was a genial, kindly, middle-aged man, with whom life had gone well in all things save one. He lost his wife within a year of his marriage, and presented to the world that unusual spectacle of a man faithful to the dead, he was not in the least broken-hearted or desponding. He took quite as much interest in things around him as other people; a keen man of business, an energetic enterprising merchant, no one could possibly call him a man whose life was blighted, and yet, since his Lucy's death, something never to be regained was lost to him.

To Robert Hunter a second marriage was not merely undesirable or unattractive, but simply impossible.

And with such sentiments, it was hardly strange that his whole affection should centre in the child his dead wife had left him, and that before she could walk alone, Beryl Hunter had

become the most important thing in life to her father.

He and his wife had had very few relations, both had been only children, so there were neither aunts nor uncles to find fault with Mr. Hunter's management of his little daughter.

The only relative he possessed was Kenneth Bertram, the son of a first cousin, who dying young, left the lad and his slender fortune to the care of the successful merchant.

Mr. Hunter acted generously by Kenneth because it was his nature to be generous, and because he really felt proud of the clever, graceful boy who seemed to steer clear of scrapes at school as though by magic, and who made his way through college with equal success.

What to do with Kenneth was rather a problem to Mr. Hunter, but the young man decided the matter for himself by saying he would read for the Bar.

He had a little money, about two hundred a year of his own, which would keep him, he said, till briefs came in, so his name was entered at the Temple.

He ate the requisite number of dinners, and was "called" just three years before he played the part of Good Samaritan to Etta Stuart.

Robert Hunter was not quite so well satisfied with his quondam ward as the years rolled on; it seemed to him Kenneth ought to be making a name for himself.

The busy merchant who at fifty-five worked hard for six or eight hours a day, just for his own satisfaction, could not understand the careless content with which Kenneth viewed his briefless condition, but on the other hand he was very fond of Kenneth, and people told him it was very difficult to get on at the Bar, so he blinded himself to his favourite's shortcomings, and if it struck him occasionally young Bertram led rather an idle life, he banished the fancy, and decided that there could not be much harm in a young man who lived on two hundred a year, never ran into debt, and asked help from no one.

If only he had known, Bertram's "paper"

was spread far and wide; his creditors were so importunate that he was getting fairly desperate, and he was to be seen on all the principal race courses trying to retrieve his fortune on the turf but then Robert Hunter went very little into society, and was not likely to hear reports of fashionable doings.

Kenneth took care his creditors should not have his address at the Fire, and as his uncle (he always called the merchant uncle, though their relationship was only cousinly) detested the turf and had not a single sporting acquaintance, there was little fear of Ken's presence at race meetings reaching Mr. Hunter's ears.

For years Mr. Bertram had lived a double life. In the gay west end circles which he loved he was known as one of the fastest men about town; at the Fire he was regarded as a harmless, pleasant young man, rather indolent perhaps, and wanting in ambition, but true as steel and as steady as time, at least that would have been Mr. Hunter's verdict.

His daughter's rather differed from it. Too innocent of the world's seamy side to know Kenneth as he really was, she yet had an instinctive feeling he was not quite sincere, and that her father's confidence in him was misplaced.

Father and daughter sat at dinner. The dessert was on the table, but Beryl still lingered in the dining-room. They were companions and friends these two, and liked their quiet evenings together.

"Kenneth must have missed his train again," remarked Beryl, as she glanced at the clock. "I told cook to keep something hot for him, but I'm afraid her patience will be exhausted."

"I wish Ken was a little more wideawake, Beryl," objected Robert Hunter, "he has such splendid abilities, if he were only a little more energetic he would be sure to get on."

Miss Hunter played idly with her watch-chain. Evening dress was not the rule at the Fire, to-night the merchant was in his frock-coat, and Beryl wore a soft summer dress of pale blue crepon, not at all an orthodox dinner costume,

but one which just suited her golden hair and large star-like blue eyes.

"I don't think he cares much about getting on, papa," she said, slowly; "Ken is hopelessly lazy, he won't take any trouble."

"He told me the other day he only wanted an object in life and he would work like a nigger," objected Mr. Hunter, "I think you are too hard on him, Beryl; he is very fascinating and much sought after in London, we ought to be flattered at his coming here so often."

"I can't fancy Ken working like a nigger," said Beryl, with all the severity of twenty, "and I suppose he has as much object in life as other people."

"He is very fond of you," said Mr. Hunter, "and your mother liked him. He was so fond of her. He used to follow her about everywhere in that one happy year she was here, she always called him her 'little knight.'"

Beryl suddenly understood her father's blind partiality for Kenneth, and why he bore with faults in young Bertram he would have condemned unapologetically in others.

"I always look on Ken as a sort of brother," said the girl gently, "if I didn't care a little for him I shouldn't be so vexed at his laziness."

"He cares more than a little for you—he wants to marry you, Beryl. He told me to-day that if only you would accept him he should have an object in life and something to work for."

Dead silence. It was Beryl Hunter's first offer and she was a girl to whom love and romance were the most precious things in life, but she felt no joy or exultation. There was a nameless voice within her whispering that Kenneth's devotion was not genuine.

"Well, my darling," said her father fondly, "Why don't you speak to me?"

"It is so very sudden."

"That's what I told Kenneth; but he says he has loved you for years, only that the difference in your fortunes prevented his speaking sooner."

"How came he to speak to-day?"

"Oh, I asked him laughingly if he never meant to marry and he said there was but one woman in the world he cared for, and she was beyond his reach. Of course I wanted to know who it was and after a little hesitation he told me."

"I am very sorry," said Beryl.

"Well, my dear; if you can't fancy him there's an end of it, but I should have liked Ken well enough as a son-in-law. He would have been content to live here instead of depriving me of my darling, and as I've known him all his life, it would not be like trusting my treasure to a stranger."

"What did you tell him, papa?"

"I told him that I married for love, and I meant my girl to do the same. I would sound you on the subject, and if you were willing his want of fortune need be no objection."

"I don't care for Kenneth, papa." The merchant hesitated.

"My dear child, are you quite sure? You always seem very friendly with Ken and he's been so much like a son to me I should be glad for him to be one in reality."

"I never mean to marry anyone," said Beryl slowly, "I am very happy as I am; you don't want to get rid of me, do you, papa?"

"You know, I don't, but Beryl, my darling, I can't live for ever. I am getting an old man, child, and I have no near relations. When I die you will be terribly alone."

It was quite true. She had not a relation in the world except Kenneth and her father. She had no very close friends, she had never taken very kindly to the City people who were Mr. Hunter's chief intimates. Few girls were more utterly without feminine friendships, and yet she had never felt any want of them because she had her father.

Mr. Hunter looked at her in a puzzled sort of way.

"I've arranged my affairs carefully, dear. My manager is to be trusted with untold gold, he would carry on the business conscientiously for your benefit. My lawyer would take every pecuniary care off your shoulders; but I can't think of a creature in the world you'd care to have here,

and you couldn't live alone in a house like this."

"But you are not going to die yet," said Beryl, anxiously, her sweet face blanching with a sudden fear. "You are not ill."

"I'm as well as man can be," he answered, cheerfully; "but child, it's right to look the future in the face. I can't live for ever. If I die in five years, ten, fifteen, it's just the same, unless you are married you will be left utterly alone."

"And you want me to marry Kenneth?"

"No, my dear, that's saying too much. I don't want you to marry at all against your own free wishes; but if you don't care particularly for anyone else and admit you 'like' Ken very much, I think you might do worse than take him. He's a good fellow and his affection must be genuine, since I had much difficulty in getting him to tell me the name of the woman he loved so hopelessly."

"I'll think about it, papa," she said, quietly; "but I wish Ken hadn't spoken to you. We are so happy as we are, I'd much rather have no change."

He guessed she wanted to drop the subject, and began to speak of her day in London. She had been up to do some shopping, and called for her father at the office, a dingy place in the heart of the great city, which did not look half pretentious enough for the premises of one of the richest merchants in London.

"I'm glad I don't live in London," she said, gravely. "Why, I suppose Percy-court is no worse than heaps of other places in the City, and I could hardly breathe there."

"Worse!" exclaimed Mr. Hunter, "it's a great deal better. Why, my dear, you don't know the value of land in inner London. I might rent a mansion at Kensington for a smaller sum than I pay for what you are pleased to call my gloomy offices in Percy-court."

"You employ a great many clerks I suppose, papa?"

"Not so many as you'd think, my dear. Perhaps twenty all told. What makes you ask?"

"Oh, I wondered if you knew their stories and all about them. There is one of them I am quite certain has a story!"

"Well, I know their names and characters, Beryl, and that's enough for me. Bates engages them and he may know a little more. He told me the last time he advertised for a copying clerk three hundred applicants came for the one situation. I can't say I ever saw anything romantic about one of the young men myself. Which of them do you credit with the 'history'?"

"I don't know his surname. His Christian name is Jack. He is tall and fair, and stoops rather as though he were tired. He has nice brown eyes, and must be three or four-and-twenty."

"John Stuart, and not a bad description," said her father much amused; "but how in the world did you find out his Christian name, young lady?"

"Oh, I saw him a long while ago, and I recognised him to-day at once. It was last summer, and I had been to Kew Gardens with Mrs. Smith, and persuaded her to come home by steamboat. There were three people sitting near us I noticed particularly, a girl, a blind man, and—Jack. I shouldn't have known his name, only the girl called him by it. They had brought their father out that he might smell the flowers in the gardens though he couldn't see them. I think it must have been the first summer he had been blind. I was following Mrs. Smith off the boat at London Bridge when the young man came up to me. I had dropped my purse and he had picked it up. I thanked him very much. Mrs. Smith said afterwards I ought to have given him five shillings, but papa, I couldn't have offered him money. He was shabby and poor I could see that, but I felt quite sure all the while he was a gentleman."

"I don't know much about him," replied her father, "but I remember Bates said he had known the family for a good many years. I

shouldn't wonder if you're right, Beryl. Did he recognise you?"

"Oh, I've seen him two or three times between the afternoon on the boat and to-day; once he and his sister—I am sure she is his sister—were coming out of St. Paul's just as I was passing; they knew me again I am sure, for when I bowed the girl smiled and coloured up all over her face. The other time was when Mrs. Smith would make me go over the Tower with her and her little nieces. I saw my two friends looking in at a shop-window we passed as we were walking back to London Bridge Station; they knew me, too; it is only to-day that I couldn't be sure, he looked on the ground each time I passed through the clerks' room."

"Ah, you see, my dear, there's a gulf between a clerk at ninety pounds a year, and his employer's daughter."

"Ninety pounds a year doesn't sound very much," said Beryl, thoughtfully.

"There are plenty of clerks to be had for less," said her father, rather ironically. "And if Stuart isn't satisfied with what I give him, he can try his luck elsewhere."

"Oh papa, you know I didn't mean it was little for you to pay; but if he has to keep his blind father and his sister out of it, it isn't very much for him to have."

Mr. Hunter was pacified. Indeed a strange feeling of remorse struck him; the twenty young men in his office might all have relations to support, and his scale of salaries was by no means high.

Liberal and even generous in his personal dealings with individuals, Mr. Hunter left all business details to Mr. Bates, who certainly did not err on the side of extravagance.

"That is Kenneth, come at last," said Beryl, "will you ask him if he wants dinner, papa; I am going to the drawing-room!"

There, in a few minutes, Mr. Bertram followed her.

She was sitting at the piano playing a low, dreamy nocturne, when his hand was laid gently on her shoulder.

"Beryl, I want to talk to you; uncle said I was to come to you for my answer."

"I told papa I would think about it," said the girl, rather sharply.

"Beryl," said Kenneth, in a low moving tone, as he gazed up into her face with the expressive violet eyes no woman had ever been able to resist; "my fate is in your hands; I have not done much to make you trust me yet, but, oh, my darling, with the hope of you before me, I will turn over a new leaf, and you shall be proud of me yet. My whole future lies in those little hands, dear; can't you give me any hope?"

The words touched her in spite of her conviction there was something wanting in this sudden attachment.

"You know I should like you to get on, Ken. I don't believe in all the world you have two truer friends than papa and I are."

"But friendship won't satisfy me, Beryl; I want something more. Can't you learn to love me? Won't you promise to trust me with the prize I covet—your sweet self?"

She looked up suddenly. Her eyes never drooped beneath his gaze. There was no love light in their blue depths.

She spoke calmly, prosaically, as though she had been a woman of fifty instead of a girl only just out of her teens.

"I don't love you, Kenneth; I don't think myself I ever shall love anyone, but I find my father has set his heart on—on this, and so—"

"And so you will yield; you shall never repeat your decision, dear."

"Hear me out," she said gravely; "you and I have always been good friends, and I think we should get on very well together; so, if you like to ask me again in three months' time, I will marry you, unless—unless we, either of us, learn what love is first!"

"What in the world do you mean?" cried Kenneth, forgetting all prudence and showing the anger he felt, "surely you can't doubt my love for you, Beryl!"

"I think you are fond of me," she said, slowly, "but I don't believe you love me as I count love;

if I were penniless I don't believe you would want to marry me!"

"Well," he said, bitterly, "I never thought you would cast my poverty in my face, or call me a fortune hunter."

"I do neither; I don't believe you love me so much that the loss of me would affect your happiness, and I know I do not love you at all; but my father has set his heart on my marrying before he dies. You and I have always been good friends, and I think we should get on well together and not rub each other the wrong way. So if in three months' time we have neither of us seen anyone we like better, and you are still in the same mind, I will marry you!"

"And you will be engaged to me now?"

"No, I won't, I must be quite free for three months. If before the first of September either of us change our minds it is not to be counted treachery to the other; there is no engagement. 'Till the first of September things are to be just as they have always been between us."

She left the room as she spoke, and Kenneth sat down feeling utterly vanquished.

"The old man hasn't a suspicion of the truth," he muttered, "but I think she has. Does she guess that I am so fearfully involved? A wealthy wife is an absolute necessity to me and she is making this absurd stipulation because she knows my creditors won't wait three months? No, Beryl goes nowhere where her eyes would be opened, and she is too unsophisticated to imagine the extent of my difficulties. Most likely her stipulation is only made from some romantic fancy about its being wrong to marry without love. It's uncommonly awkward for me. I'm about at the end of my tether now, and I don't believe I can keep afloat for another three months. I must try and start a rumour I'm engaged to the rich Miss Hunter. If my creditors believe it, it may make them a little more tractable."

CHAPTER V.

LANCLOUT UNDERWOOD found himself quite a public character when he reached Barton. Nothing in this world succeeds like success, and the friends and neighbours who had thought Lance a very ordinary young man when he went away were prepared to welcome him as a prodigy now that he had achieved fortune.

A thousand a year! won, too, without the least expenditure of capital (except his passage to the colony). A thousand a year before he was thirty! No wonder everyone looked on him as a credit to the town, and Mrs. Underwood's visitors were so numerous that her drawing-room would hardly hold them.

"Have you called on the Underwoods?" demanded Mr. Wilson of his wife one day at breakfast.

"Not very lately."

"I mean since Lancelot has returned," said the lawyer. "Of course we must go and welcome him back. Why, old Underwood and I were sworn friends and I'm sure there was a time when I expected you to marry Lance instead of a prosy, middle-aged widow."

There was no help for it, Lena could not avoid the visit without a long and painful explanation. So in the very room where she had parted from her lover she was forced to greet him again with her husband as a witness of their meeting.

She need not have feared. Lancelot greeted her with perfect courtesy, nothing more—in fact his manner was so distinctly polite that Mr. Wilson decided he had a short memory for old friends.

It was the lawyer and Mrs. Underwood who did the most talking. Lena contributed very little to the conversation, and Lancelot seemed a little bored. It was only in speaking of his employer that he warmed into anything like enthusiasm.

"No, I shall only stay a few months in the old country," he told the lawyer. "Mr. Benham is getting an old man, and I do not want to leave him alone longer than I can help. He is kind enough to look on me as a kind of adopted son, and his house is my home."

"Marvellous good fortune that you met him,"

said the lawyer, "but you always were a lucky fellow, Lance."

"I think I have been fortunate on the whole," said Lance, "though perhaps I have not always felt so, but I am quite contented with things as they are."

And Lena Wilson had to listen to him and knew he meant he was content to have lost her, that he thought himself fortunate to have found out her true character in time. The woman winced as she heard him, for Lancelot Underwood was the love of her life, she had forsaken him from worldly motives, and lo, had she only been true to her word, love and money would both have been hers.

"You'd better take a wife out with you," said Mr. Wilson, heartily. "When a young man like you gets on so well it's his duty to marry, and Barton's your native town. Lance, you ought to give our young ladies a chance. I'm sure there are plenty for you to choose from."

Mr. Underwood returned the Wilsons' visit, but on a day when both were out, he noticed through an open door some of the children playing in the garden under the care of a pretty gipsy-like girl, whom his sister Margaret told him was their governess.

"Mr. Wilson always declares he can't afford such a luxury, but Lena insisted upon it, and I believe they got this girl ridiculously cheap. She has very few accomplishments, and had never been out before."

Lance Underwood had a peculiarly good memory for faces, so when strolling in the woods between Barton Park and Chislehurst, the following Sunday afternoon, he came across the same pretty sparkling brunette, he recognised her at once as Mrs. Wilson's governess, though he was more than a little surprised to see her walking alone with a fashionably attired stranger.

"If that girl has no friends in the place, Lena ought to look after her better," was his first verdict, but after another glance at the trim little figure in blue, which leaned so confidently on the gentleman's arm, he decided he had made a mistake. No doubt the two were "properly" engaged, and the avain came down from London to see his lady love on Sunday afternoon as being her only free time.

They passed him so close that Etta's blue skirt almost touched him, but neither seemed to notice the tall stranger reading under the shade of the spreading tree.

"And you really go home so soon," he heard the man say, and the tone was not one of rejoicing.

"Yes, next week. Papa wrote and said I was to leave as soon as Mrs. Wilson could spare me."

"It's an awful shame. I shall miss you terribly, but," in a lighter tone, "there are such things as trains, and there are heaps of places near London where I can meet my Princess and enjoy the pleasure of her society."

They were out of sight. Underwood tossed away the end of his cigar contemptuously. So they were not lovers after all—only playing at love-making, though there had been an earnestness in the girl's voice, a light in her large dark eyes, which seemed to say it was not play to her.

"Poor child!" reflected Lance, as he strolled home. "If she has pined her faith and hope on that man I pity her. Why he is far too handsome to be trustworthy. In romantic novels the deceitful hero always has fair hair and violet eyes."

Lance had now been more than a month at Barton. His family affairs were quite settled, and so far as his own business was concerned he might have returned to Alicetown by the next steamer. This being so he was at liberty to begin the quest his old friend had so much at heart. He told his mother he should be constantly engaged in London for several weeks, but would run down occasionally from Saturday to Monday. She must write to him if she wanted him in between whiles, and he gave her the address of Mr. Benham's London agents, not a little thankful that his womanhood were so little troubled by curiosity as to ask no inconvenient questions. Lance had not the least idea how he meant to proceed, but his first step was to settle himself at a quiet private hotel in one of the

many streets off the Strand. It was a comfortable thing to feel that he had no need to look at sixpences.

Of course he could have pursued his search from Barton, and come up and down to London every day, but he had grown wonderfully reserved during his absence. He would have hated having to give the slightest account of his actions, and so he preferred complete independence, and when he had engaged a private sitting-room at the Clarence, and told the waiter he might possibly stop two or three nights, or even longer, he felt he had accomplished a great deal.

He looked carefully through old Geoff's letters—he had written by every mail—but they told very little more than he knew from his employer's own narrative.

Geoffrey evidently feared his relations had fallen on evil times, and that his friend would find the "genteel family" in very poor circumstances.

He begged Lancelot to help them in every way possible, but to be most careful of wounding their feelings, and suggested he should try and make their acquaintance in some other way before he disclosed to them that he was their cousin's ambassador.

"You see," wrote the richest man in Alicetown almost pathetically, "it's quite natural Jim and the others shouldn't like my getting on. They always looked on me as a poor relation, and I'm quite sure if they lived to be a hundred they'd never forget that my mother kept a sweetstuff shop, and after her death I was brought up in an orphan asylum."

"He ought to have found some woman to do the job," said Lancelot, disconsolately, as he flung aside the letter in despair. "How in the world am I to scrape acquaintance with the Stuarts. A woman could have called about some church meeting, or for the character of a servant, or a hundred things, but a man can't go to see total strangers without some tangible reason; in London, too, where people may live next door to each other for years and yet never know each other. I've a great mind to wire to old Geoff that it can't be done."

But Lance loved the old man too well for that; besides, he was a man who hated the word failure; he did not mind the time and trouble he took about the matter, what daunted him was the initial difficulty of introducing himself to the Stuarts.

"After all," he reflected as he went to bed, "I may be worrying myself needlessly; they may all be dead, or have gone away to one knows where. I'll run down to-morrow and reconnoitre the district; he said there was a plate on the door, and they had kept a school for years. There must be some ancient inhabitant left who remembers the school. Not so very ancient either, for the pupils who went there when Mr. Benham left England would be well under forty now; well I'll have a try."

He did not start so very early the next day. He read the paper, wrote a few letters, and altogether it was after eleven when he strolled down to the Temple Pier and took a steamer for London Bridge.

It was the middle of June, and one of those heavenly days when one feels glad even to be alive. The sky was a cloudless blue, the water smooth as a sea of glass. The trees to be seen at intervals on the banks in the gardens of public institutions were in full foliage. As the steamer moved gently onward, Lance wondered if anyone in the crowd of passengers had come upon an errand so strange and romantic as his own.

Arrived at Ashley Green he steered straight for the church, judging that Church-street must be in its immediate neighbourhood. He entered the disused burial ground, and sat down on one of the nearest benches to decide his next step. There had been a service of some kind at the church, and the worshippers were filing out.

Lance wondered if it would be of any use to speak to the clergyman, but decided not. Old Geoff had said nothing of the religious views of his kindred. They might be Plymouth Brethren or Salvationists; besides, this dignified, middle-aged gentleman looked hardly old enough to have been a London Rector twenty-five years before.

Lance began to have serious misgivings whether Church-street itself was to be found, but at last he came upon it well nigh hidden between two modern thoroughfares which quite eclipsed the old-world looking road. It was not very long and at that he took heart.

There were no gardens, the doors opened straight on to the street. He wondered where Mr. Stuart's boys in the old days had played their games; for there was no sign of any place that could have been used as a playground, and then he came suddenly to a stop. There in front of him, as bright as though fresh from the engraver's hands instead of having stood the wear and tear of a century, was the big brass plate described by old Geoff.—

"Commercial Academy—Conducted by Mr. Stuart."

Lance crossed the road and looked across at the house. Yes, it bore token of having been in the same hands for years. The hideous horse-hair blinds could surely not be purchased nowadays. The sticky looking ivy which half covered one side of the house must have been planted long, long ago to have reached even its present growth, and then, as though to settle any lingering doubt that might have troubled him, the door opened, and ten little girls emerged. They carried bags of books, and, for the most part, wore very smart aprons and sailor hats. Clearly, they were the children of the petty tradespeople in the neighbourhood, whose views were too select to let their girls go to the gigantic Board-school hard by, and who had not succeeded in getting them into the venerable grammar school of Queen Elizabeth's Foundation which was the glory of the district.

"But they are girls!" Lance spoke almost aloud in his perplexity. "Mr. Benham said it was a boys' school, I am certain of it."

He followed the children half absently, and when they were out of Church-street he spoke to the youngest, a plump, chubby little thing of six or seven, very small but with all the sharpness of a London child.

"Who keeps your school?" asked Lance, slipping a penny into her hand. "Is it Mr. Stuart?"

"No, Mr. Stuart gave up long ago," replied the mite. "Ma says he didn't get enough boys after the new Board-school opened; it's Miss Stuart who teaches us. When her father gave up, as they'd got the forms and plate and all, she said she'd have a try. Ma says she works pretty hard but she's got no style."

Lancelot thanked the little lady and departed. He had learned two things: James Stuart was certainly still alive and he had married; probably very soon after his cousin left England, if he had a daughter old enough to keep a school.

"I might call and ask for a prospectus," he mused; "and it would be the best plan to go now, so as not to interfere with the school hours."

He crossed the road and knocked at the door of No. 55, then he felt so nervous and embarrassed that he longed to run away, but at that moment he caught sight of something he had not noticed before.

In the window, over that where a bird's cage hung, was a card, a most superior highly-glazed card, certainly the newest thing about the house, and on that card the magic words,—

"Furnished apartments."

"It's the very thing," decided Mr. Underwood; "I'll take the rooms, then I must find out all Mr. Benham wants to know; if they are very uncomfortable I can have all my meals out; it doesn't matter much where a man sleeps."

The door was opened by a gaunt middle-aged woman who had the word "genteel" stamped on every feature; her rusty black dress and lace cap, her mittened hands and alpaca apron all seemed to speak to Underwood of a bygone time; he seemed to hear old Geoff's story over again, and his employer's voice declaring "Mary was so very genteel, that he could not fancy her marrying any man she was likely to meet at Ashley Green"; no, it was utterly impossible to fancy that tall, gaunt woman a wife or mother; Lance imagined just how she would have looked when she heard of her sister's engagement to a "comp," nearly thirty years ago, and just how she would have moralised on the offence to the family gentility.

And all the while Miss Stuart was looking at him sharply and wondering what in the world he wanted, and why he didn't say—

"I beg your pardon," said Lancelot, suddenly recalled to the present, "but I think you have rooms to let; can I see them?"

"I'll call my niece," said Aunt Mary, tartly, "it's her doing. I never thought after being born and bred in this house, and living here fifty years and more respectably, I should come to taking lodgers. You can come in, sir, and sit down, it's not your fault."

She meant to be conciliatory, but Lance decided any ordinary lodger would have been repelled by this peculiar reception. He himself felt distinctly chilled, but he persevered for old Geoff's sake.

She had shown him into the sitting-room, to the right-hand of the door, evidently the one opposite was shortly to be the scene of the family dinner; whiffs of some savoury odour, rather resembling Irish-stew were even now borne to him.

He sat down on one of the forms and looked at the bare white-washed walls, the rickety table and the very antiquated piano. No wonder the pupils were few; why "failure" was written on every wall of that dreary schoolroom.

"You wished to see the rooms, I think?"

He looked up; someone had come quietly in and now stood regarding him with such anxiety that Lance felt certain, in spite of Miss Stuart's gentility, lodgers were most eagerly desired.

The newcomer was a tall, fair-haired girl in a grey dress, half-covered by a large holland apron, scrupulously clean and tidy; a pleasant, honest English face, but with almost too much anxiety in the dark, earnest grey eyes, and a world of silent pathos about the pretty mouth.

Lance roused himself.

"I saw the card in the window. I ought to tell you, Miss Stuart, I am quite a stranger here. I want to spend a little time in this neighbourhood because I am making notes for a friend who is—much interested in—in this part of old London; I should not be a permanent lodger, I only want the rooms for a short time, but," seeing her face fall, "I quite expect for that reason to pay a higher rent, and I am out so much I should not give much trouble."

"Will you come and look at the rooms?" asked Elizabeth gravely. She felt her darling scheme of earning enough money by lodgers for the operation on her father's eyes would not be fulfilled in "a few weeks," but this visit was the very first result of the card she had placed in the window so hopefully a month ago, and she could not afford to despise even trifling gains.

The drawing-room was a revelation to Lance. Had people ever really lived in such rooms? Why, there was not a chair one could sit on comfortably, and the horsehair of the furniture was so slippery it would be rather difficult to sit at all. The bedroom was yet more depressing. A four-poster hung with indigo moresen took up fully one half of it. But Lance was prepared to sacrifice a great deal to his friendship for old Geoff.

"What is the rent, Miss Stuart?"

"Ten shillings a week, unless you required late dinner, then it would be a trifle more."

Late dinner? Why, in all probability she would have to cook it when her scholastic labours were over.

"I always dine out, Miss Stuart. Do you think fifteen shillings a week would satisfy you? People always pay more if they only come for a short time."

"I am sure it would. Our family," the gentle girl's voice took a ring of pride, "have lived here for over a hundred years. I suppose you wouldn't want any other references?"

"Oh, dear no. I have only lately returned to England, Miss Stuart, and I haven't many references at hand, but my father—he died last year—was Rector of Barton, in Kent—you'll find his name in the clergy list for last year. I hope that will be enough."

"Quite," said Elizabeth simply, "and when would you like to come?"

"Next Monday, if convenient to you—good morning, Miss Stuart."

"A clergyman's son!" said Aunt Mary hope-

fully, when she heard the news; "that sounds genteel."

"He seems very pleasant," agreed Elizabeth, "but I'm afraid he's poor."

"Whatever made you think so? I'm sure he was most respectably dressed."

"Yes; but he didn't bargain—rich people always try to beat one down."

"Poor girl," was Lancelot's reflection, as he walked back to his hotel, "it's easy to see she has all the burden of the family on her shoulders. It's a pity old Geoff didn't come home himself. He might have adopted her. She really is rather nice-looking if she wasn't so thin."

And he dismissed her from his mind, little guessing the leading part Elizabeth Stuart was to play in his life, or all that was to come of his introduction to one of Fortune's stepchildren.

(To be continued.)

CINDERELLA.

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CHAPTER XLII.

THIS is the story of the packet. It was one that Matilda had taken from the dead woman's desk, but, strange to say, had not broken the seals.

She had given it over to Pauline that fatal August afternoon in a sudden burst of generosity, and Pauline had it rifled from her pocket and flung away.

Villaini had carelessly tossed it among the bushes, and it had fallen into a hollow in the bark of an old beech-tree, and there remained among wet damp leaves for more than a year, greatly to the injury of its condition. From this place it was removed by a young poacher, who was setting snares for rabbits and looking for squirrels' nests on the same occasion, and in seeking the latter in what he thought a very "likely looking" spot, his hand came upon this bulky, blue, mildewed packet of papers.

He took it home, hoping that he had found a treasure such as he had read of, and that it would contain hundreds of beautiful bank-notes.

But alas! for his hopes. When he opened it there was nothing of the sort to be discovered, only a number of sheets of glued paper, written on in faded brown ink, and in what was worse, a foreign language (French). This deceiving packet he had stowed out of sight on a shelf above his head, as he did not choose to answer any unpleasant questions as to where he found it, knowing well that the Mount Rivers's demesne was not supposed to be public property, and that already there were disagreeable whispers abroad "that he was a rare young poacher."

And how it came into Mr. Lorraine's hands was as follows. When he went down to search for Pauline on his own account a sudden heavy storm drove him into the cottage of this boy's mother, and Jim, the young poacher, was himself no longer able to take "his delight on a shiny night."

He was evidently dying of consumption, and was laid out on a long settle bed under the window, with great gaunt cheek bones, and sunken, wistful eyes.

Poor boy! one did not need to be told that his days were numbered. He and his visitor had a long talk, and the talk veered round to the big place and all the strange things that had happened there within late years.

"Ever since Mr. and Mrs. Rivers died, mother says it looks as if there had been a curse on the place—everything went to the bad."

"They do say as how Miss Rivers, that's the Countess now, made a great promise to her step-mother, when she was on her death-bed, as how she would be a mother to her child," put in Jim's mother from the chimney corner, where she was stooping over a concoction in a saucepan (doubtless for the invalid). "And a nice mother she was to her, by all accounts!" raising herself erect as she spoke, with a snort of indignation. "There was queer stories about him too—the foreign Count—"

and only she's alive I'd have said he had made away with her that time there was all the stir, and her parcel was found in the Black Grove!"

"Something else was found, too," said the boy Jim, looking hard at Mr. Lorraine. "I picked some papers out of the hollow of an old tree," colouring faintly in his wan face.

"And what did you do with them?" asked his visitor, quickly.

"I just thought brought 'em home—they above there on the shelf," nodding his head upwards with a jerk. "You can look at 'em if you like—but there of no 'count."

Mr. Lorraine was by no means so sure of that, and reached down the dusty bundle with magical haste.

But he was also disappointed. They were a series of sheets of paper, written over in French in a pointed foreign hand, and the date was that of a time before Pauline was born.

Still he would have taken them, believing them to have an interest for some member of the Rivers' family, but the boy refused to part with them yet.

"I like looking at them, though I can't read 'em; and sometimes I fancy they are money or money's worth. When I'm gone," and a hacking cough interrupted him, "mother will send 'em to you, if you're a fancy for them."

Mr. Lorraine left a good sum of money with the boy's mother and his address and said he would be glad to have the papers at any time, ignoring the melancholy conditions.

And now, two days after his return, he found a clumsy parcel lying at his club, accompanied by a scrawl, which ran as follows:—

"HONORED SIR,—

"I send you the letters, as Jim said you was to have. He is dead and buried since Friday. With humble duty, your obedient servant,

"MARY MURRAY."

The packet was then opened, somewhat later, by Mr. Lorraine, who casually glanced through the pale close writing till one name suddenly riveted his attention.

He turned the paper over, began at the very beginning, and never laid it down until he had read the last line.

This is the same identical document which he now tosses down on the table between himself and Pauline, and assuring her that if, after she had read that diary, she is still in the same mind he will be much astonished. He took up his hat and made her an abrupt farewell.

He was gone, and Pauline was smoothing out the stained yellow letter-paper almost before she could realise the fact, and soon she was absorbed in its perusal.

The beginning of the note had evidently been torn off, and perhaps washed away, and the writing commenced somewhat abruptly,—

"It is folly, I know, for no eye will ever see this; still it is a relief to write—nearly as great a relief as to speak—and if I did not, I should go mad, mad, mad! Oh! my dear, worthy, commonplace English husband! If you could hear me! Oh! my hard, critical, inquisitive, detesting step-daughters! If you could but know my past!

"But rest easy; you never shall! I am writing now for two reasons—one as a kind of mental escape-pipe, a safety-valve; the other reason is, to put down things that I may never forget them—no, not the smallest item.

"At present every detail is branded on my brain in fire, but time softens the past, heals scars, pleads for forgiveness, blurs over terrible wrongs—it shall never efface mine as long as I live and as long as this paper exists. Let me commence at the beginning. What do I remember first? A palace in St. Petersburg, with a big white portico and shallow steps, droakys with their horses, sleighs and bells and monik drivers, torchlight, swift sleighing on the Neva, a house full of servants, an English nurse, a French 'bonne', money and friends in abundance, but no mother. There were Sergius, my brother, Nathalie, and me, and our Aunt Sophie, who kept us all in order, including my father.

"After this a long time, we seemed to become

very quiet. There was a sort of mystery always around us like a fog, and queer, strange people to be met on the stairs at night. Then we were sent to the summer palace, near Moscow, and we stayed away for four years, father coming to see us now and then, and bringing his strange friends.

"Sergius was now nineteen, an officer in the Imperial Foot Guards. I was seventeen, and grown up, and Nathalie was a year younger. She was very pretty, far prettier than I was—her features were so delicate, her eyes so brilliant.

"She was a creature full of fire and energy and impulse. I had a lover, a brother officer of Sergius, but older. His father had a summer palace within five versts of ours, and Alexander and I had known one another as children.

"How can I tell how it happened! But we loved one another very, very much. How adorable he looked in his full dress uniform, with white braided coat and furs!

"I close my eyes—I see him now! Alas! in life I shall never see him more. How could I tell my husband, that good, honest man, who knows not emotion or sentiment, that my heart is buried in Alex De Bodisco's grave?

"Alex had a brother, Ivan, as different to him as night from the sun—dark and stealthy in his disposition; avaricious, cruel, grasping, full of envy, full of deceit, fair, and sly—small and insignificant. To Nathalie I always called him the 'white adder'—but Nathalie liked him a little—deluded girl!—and, will it be conceived, he actually made proposals to me also, well knowing that I was his brother's promised bride.

"Alex was the eldest son. Ivan hated him bitterly for that cause, and on account of me. Alas! what is more potent than envy?

"I was said to be my aunt's heiress—my rich Aunt Sophie. I was to make a good match—a duke, a prince, they all declared.

"But Alex was good enough for me. His father was only a count, but he was a great person at Court, a favourite with the Emperor, and the head of the secret police—a post of honour in St. Petersburg, and a post of danger too.

"Alex told me that there were grave matters in hand—that the Empire was honeycombed by a secret society that threatened its very existence, and that was closing round the Upper Ten as the folds of a box gradually closes in suffocating its victim.

"But I was young, I was giddy, I was seventeen. I put these things far from me. I rode and drove and sung and amused myself. It was but the calm that comes before the storm.

"These halcyon days were short-lived. Gradually, very gradually, the truth was allowed to dawn on me.

"My father, Sergius, and Aunt Sophie were secret, but ever busy conspirators. Ivan de Bodisco was the very mind and centre of their plots; and Nathalie, my younger sister, was given over to their schemes body and soul. One shock came to me after another, and I was prepared for the worst.

"I was a tacit member myself. Was I not aware of the secret councils, the stealthy comings and goings?

"Who knows but I might have been active in the cause, too, but for Alex.

"Little did he dream of what I knew when he poured out his confidences into my ears, and his bitter condemnation of well-born gentlemen who were ready to plunge the country into civil war, to pit class against class, brother against brother; who did not stop at dark and secret means to carry out terrible deeds, and who shunned the daylight like so many owls.

"Latterly my father had looked but coldly on my intimacy with Alex, although in former years I had known my father to say he 'loved him as a son; that he was all that we could wish to see—a chivalrous gentleman.'

"Now his opinion was changed, as well as his politics—now Ivan was his favourite, and Alex was given the cold shoulder, and a still cooler welcome.

"Sergius was short in his manner, my father chill, Nathalie snappish, Aunt Sophie intolerable, but I did my best to make up to him for all slights; and, indeed, he often and often said, only he loved me so dearly, he never could have borne such undeserved treatment, and such a frosty reception from his oldest friends. Poor Alex never dreamt of the true reason, and I dared not tell him.

"My relatives were, in their own opinion, the representatives of retributive justice. They were to subvert all present institutions, and leave not (figuratively speaking) one stone on another.

"Alex, on the contrary, was a sworn defender of the throne, loyal to the very marrow of his bones and beyond the most inspired persuasions, or the most fabulous bribes.

"Give him up—give him up!" was the family chorus, 'it is dangerous to us to have him about here. He is not, and never can be one of us. Send him away.'

"At this time we lived, as it were, on the edge of a volcano. My father and aunt Sophie were displeased and disappointed with me, but I held to my own way, I would not resign my lover.

"Nathalie, too, befriended me. She sympathised with my love affair; she liked Alex, although he was a tyrant, and although my interest in the 'cause' was nil.

"We came to St. Petersburg once more for the winter season. We were very gay. Our drawing-rooms were thrown open, the dinner parties and balls the most brilliant of the season.

"Nathalie and I were presented at court, but I knew that it was all a blind, that underneath this constant whirl a darker undercurrent was steadily carrying all before it.

"I had a presentiment that something dreadful was going to happen. It was coming nearer and nearer, and I had felt it especially one evening, even when I was dancing—the Dance de la Cour—in the Imperial White Palace, surrounded by lights, and jewels, and smiling faces.

"And, therefore, when Nathalie, in the early hours of that dark morning, rushed into my room in her dressing-gown, I was prepared for anything.

"Pauline," she cried, 'there's frightful work downstairs—murder—all is discovered—I believe the police are on our track. Come down, throw on something, and let us listen. They are all in the cedar-room—Sergius, my father, Alex, and another officer.'

"I lost no time in putting my feet into slippers, and wrapping myself in a long fur mantle that reached to the ground, and following my sister with palpitating heart. We made our way into a cupboard at the back of the cedar-room, and looked nervously through a stained-glass window. It was red, it made everything look as if it were steeped in blood.

"Unhappy augury! The cupboard was in an outer passage, and sunken in the thick wall, but it had no door into the cedar-room, only a sham-coloured glass window, to which our eye-balls were now pressed as if they were about to burst from our heads.

"We could scarcely hear a syllable, as the door was not a door, but a wall; but we made out, from stray words and gestures, that Alex, who was present, had discovered that the greater part of the treason plotted was under our roof—that by some means, some hint dropped by his father, he had come to warn us in time. Infatuated Alex!

"He mentioned a list of names in his own possession, and looked at his brother Ivan sternly—Ivan, who merely said something and laughed.

"There were present Sergius, Ivan de Bodisco, and another officer—a friend of Alex—my father and two well-known noblemen had just left the room. Among these hot-headed young men arose high words—very high words—pistols were promptly produced, the room cleared.

"Oh! how our hearts beat. Who were going to fight?—Sergius and the young Cossack officer. How fierce they looked—how determined! Now the distance was paced—could we not stop it in time?

"I beat my hands frantically upon the window, and screamed,—

"Sergius! Sergius!" but I was not heard—I was too late. I saw, through that awful red window, this—my brother erect against the stove at the end of the room, facing me—Ivan with his back to the door—the others I could not see—then a sharp report—a scream—Sergius had fallen. He threw up both arms, and fell forward on his face, stone dead—a victim to the Hand of Justice—only nineteen years of age. So young, so full of life, so brave and enthusiastic, and, alas! so mistaken.

"But the other man was also dead or dying. I saw Alex lift his body, and carry it over and lay it upon a sofa within sight. As he did so he raised his head, and looked towards his brother Ivan, who still stood with a pistol in his hand and his back to the door. He raised this pistol, and aimed and fired deliberately, and shot Alex through the brain.

"Yes, with his own hand he killed his brother. I will always maintain it, though, save the eyes to whom nothing is hidden, none saw the awful act save mine. Nathalie had fainted in a heap at my feet the instant she saw Sergius fall, and nothing remained in the room with the murderer but three corpses—and 'dead men tell no tales.'

"I saw no more. I awoke raving on my bed, with Nathalie bending over me, the door locked, no one admitted but Aunt Sophie and herself. I believe I was delirious for days, and, when I came to myself I was the ghost of what I had been—I looked fifty instead of eighteen.

"But, weak as I was, I lost no time in violently denouncing Ivan de Bodisco to my broken-hearted father—to my aunt—to anyone who would listen to me. Alas! he had told his story first, and made it good.

"No one believed me, my brain was turned, they said; and it was Sergius, they declared, who shot Alex first, and then his friend, in a duel. Of this fact Ivan took his solemn oath upon the Greek Bible.

"What proof had I? How could I see through that dark closet? Nathalie was there, she believed in Ivan's innocence—I was mistaken—I was mad!

"Sergius, Alex, and Paul, the Cossack officer, were buried at night, where I know not; but as they fell they lie, somewhere together, until that great day when the graves shall be opened, and no secrets shall be hid.

"Alex's father and friends were frantic at their loss, and left no stone unturned to find him, but suspicion never looked our way. Had we not a son missing also—Sergius?

"Time healeth all things, but it never healed my heart. Nathalie was my only consolation, and even here what a gulf there was between us! She was devoted to the Hand of Justice—devoted heart and soul, whilst I loathed its very name, and made no secret of the fact! Had it not cost me a lover and a brother?

"Suspicion had blown over, the conspirators were easy in their minds once more. We had done with mourning, we were very gay outwardly. How could I be gay ever again as long as I lived! The sight I saw through that crimson-paned window had killed every cheerful feeling in my disposition, as if it were a plant seared by one night's dreadful blight. I did not know how to laugh now.

"My aunt was anxious I should marry—indeed, I was not much comfort in the family, it were well I was settled; I would have a fine fortune and my mother's diamonds. Aunt Sophie had given her interest to a most eligible suitor, Prince Kouraki, and urged me to accept him with entreaties, bribes, threats and tears. But I was obdurate—I would never marry.

"Ivan de Bodisco, too, secretly persecuted me with his hateful addresses, despite my unveiled, shrinking abhorrence of him. He would not listen to no.

"What can you want with me but my money? I asked him, fiercely. 'And you are rich now, you have your brother's fortune. You did not forget that you were his heir when you raised your hand, as you stood at the door, and took steady aim. He was looking at you, too;

his eyes met yours. Do they not haunt you? Do you not see them when you shut your own—and in the dark?'

"For once Ivan was moved. He became ghastly and guiltily white; his lips trembled, beads of perspiration stood out upon his brow. I saw that he feared me, and I went on,—

"I may not live to do it, Ivan de Bodisco, but your brother Alex shall be avenged. Nemesis is slow, but she is sure. Do not doubt but that she will overtake you yet. And there will be no mercy for you—you second Cain!

"After this I had no more of his attentions, but he took another form of persecuting me. He completely poisoned my aunt's mind against me and my father's. They believed that I was an informer, a traitress; that I only waited for an opportunity to sell their lives, and avenge the death of Alex.

"My life now was too unbearable, I could not endure it. I made up my mind to run away. I took Nathalie into my confidence only. I packed my diamonds, some money, a small supply of clothes, and actually started off to Paris, where, by means of a letter of introduction I had procured, and under my mother's maiden name, 'Warren,' I got a place as companion to an old lady.

"Ugh! how I hated it! I, Pauline, Countess Dornanoff, driving in her stuffy carriage, combing her peevish poodle, mixing her medicine, reading, writing, carrying cushions and hot jars, and being alternately petted and scolded. I did not like it, but it was better than De Bodisco's neighbourhood.

"How often I wished he was dead, or that I was dead. Life was very monotonous and dreary.

"I wished I lay in an unknown grave beside poor Sergius and Alex. I wished for rest and peace. And they came in my way very strangely and unexpectedly.

"An English gentleman, elderly, rich, kind, old enough to be my father, saw me at Madame Riviere's, and positively fell in love with me and asked me to marry him, and I did. After some hesitation I married him one morning very quietly at the British Embassy.

"Who would believe it! I am no longer Miss Warren, but Mrs. Rivers. I have a big house, a fine carriage—which I hate—a maid, three powdered footmen, and alas! two grown-up stepdaughters.

"They do not like me; but I shall do them no harm; all I ask for is peace. I want no balls, no admiration, no diamonds—and they are so jealous of their poor little family gew-gaws.

"Nathalie has not written to me for a year. They whispered that she was dead. No, I should feel it, I'm sure, if she was. They said my father had got into trouble at last, poor, infatuated father.

"I believe that man will betray you yet—that man you believe in as you do in our Greek Patriarch himself.

"You and my aunt were very furiously angry. She will never forgive me, not alone for running away, for hating the great cause, but on account of her protégé, Prince Kouraki. I might have been Princess Kouraki, lady of honour to the Empress, and I am only plain Mrs. Rivers, wife of an English squire. Perhaps—nay, surely—it is best so; only I hope I shall not be discovered.

"At that ball at Frogborough Town Hall I saw Lord Halmesley whispering and looking at me very hard.

"He has danced with me on the banks of the Neva, but he does not know it; he would never expect to see the Countess Pauline among these respectable British matrons who talk of the weather and their servants and their stupid little scandals till I am often inclined to yawn in their faces.

"Am I growing ill-natured and soured and uncharitable? Ah, well, it does not matter! Something tells me I shall not live to be very old.

"I dreamt of a wedding last night—"

Here the paper came to an end as abruptly as

it had commenced—some of it had been torn away—there was no more.

Pauline's hands had trembled so much latterly she had not been able to hold it, but had placed it before her on the little table, leaning her elbows firmly down, and, resting her head upon her hands, had perused it in that fashion.

When it was all finished she fell back in her chair, and looked as if she were going to faint, but she did not.

She sat very still for some moments, and then, gathering up the sheets very carefully, she went into the house, and despatched a telegram to Oscar Loraine, Blue Club, Pall Mall:—

"I wish to see you at once—to-day, if possible."

CHAPTER LXII. AND LAST.

LADY CURZON, in her eager haste, forgot that Mr. Loraine could not have yet reached London; indeed, on second thoughts, a man on horseback, if he galloped all the way, might intercept him at the railway station; and a light-weight groom on a very smart hack was just in the nick of time to see the train going out of the station.

So the telegram was sent, and Mr. Loraine arrived at the Manor for the second time that day, just after dinner, and was shown into the drawing-room, where, of course, he found Lady Curzon alone.

She had been in a state of feverish excitement all the afternoon; she had not touched afternoon tea, nor tasted a morsel of dinner, to the disgust of Letty, who had an excellent appetite, with which nothing ever interfered.

As she looked at her friend's pale face, and at the curious, restless expression of her eyes, she asked herself, in some alarm,—

"Could she be going off her head again?" But no; she was soon reassured by Pauline saying,—

"I'm sure you think I am very odd, Letty, and I'm sure I look odd, and I cannot eat, and I cannot rest. One thing I must tell you, I'm not going to marry Count de Bodisco; I would sooner die," speaking between her set teeth.

"Oh! Pauline how glad I am!" exclaimed the other, coming round the table with a rush, and embracing her with an ecstatic hug. "I knew you could not bear him. I could not bear him. This match made me wretched; but you have been so reserved I did not like to speak. Have you quarrelled? When did you break it off, or was it"—hesitating, and looking hard at her companion—"on account of Mr. Loraine?"

Pauline did not answer this treble-barrelled question; her expectant ears had caught a ring.

"Is it the Count?" demanded Letty, rather nervously.

"No, Letty, it is not. I hope he will never ring at this door again," said the other, rising from her untasted meal. "He is a very bad man an infamous man. You shall hear all; another time I will explain everything that I can explain."

"Mr. Loraine, my lady, in the drawing-room," said a footman, flinging the door open, and feeling that something or other uncommon was "up" this particular evening.

Of course, he had no prospect of gratifying his curiosity; neither had Mrs. Denham, who sat at the end of the table, looking blankly after her friend, her curiosity justly whetted, and yearning for particulars.

Mr. Loraine was standing by the fire, when Pauline entered.

"It was very good of you to come so soon," she said, approaching the mantel piece, and laying her hand on it to steady herself, "I have read it all."

"So I conclude. And what is the result? Have you dared to change your mind?" he asked impressively.

"I have," she answered. "I would rather suffer any fate than marry De Bodisco."

"How did you ever listen to him?" he asked, in a voice of peremptory entreaty—"he is old enough to be your father."

"Oh, don't; you need not repeat all that," she

exclaimed, with a gesture of passionate protest. "I will refuse to marry him now or ever, and I believe sincerely that this refusal will cost me my life," she added, with the composure of utter despair.

"Pauline, you are mad to talk like this," said her companion, impatiently. "Leave me to deal with him. I do not ask you to marry me, but I would rather see you in your grave than that man's wife. By any means I must compass your escape. Give me the key to the secret that locks your lips; it is the only chance, and let me act for you as your friend—your brother."

"Oscar"—she paused, and then went on firmly—"I will tell you the secret, but were it known to other ears that I had divulged it I am a dead woman."

"Nonsense, Pauline; you are too fanciful! There are no such secrets now-a-days in this nineteenth century; and even if it were as you say, you know that anything you tell me is as safe as if it had never passed your own bosom. What is this heavy secret?" with an incredulous smile.

Pauline looked timidly round the room ere she replied, as if she actually believed the old adage that walls had ears, and then facing her companion who was leaning his elbow carelessly on the chimney-piece, statue-like, with hands tightly clenched and bloodless lips, she said,—

"Prepare yourself for a great shock—a great surprise."

"Nothing that you could tell me would astonish me," he said. "After last Tuesday in Piccadilly there are no surprises left for me," he replied emphatically.

"You have heard of the Society of the Hand of Justice?" she said, in a chill, strange voice.

"I have. Is it not the curse of Europe? But how came you to even know of its existence?"

"I—I—I have been a sworn member for nine years."

Crash went a Sevres vase down on the fender, the result of a sudden jerk from Mr. Lorraine's elbow.

There were, then, still surprises in store for him, after all.

He merely stood and looked at her in silence. He could not speak, neither could she, for one or two moments, and the strain became unendurable.

His accusing eyes were maddening, and at last she spoke.

"Nay, you need not shrink from me with horror," she said, in a voice of bitter disdain. "I was no more to blame than my mother. I was not a free agent."

And hereupon, with hasty, almost incoherent speech, she related to her astonished listener the tale of the Dwarf that haunted Miss Jones's select seminary, of her own unlucky discovery of a party of conspirators hatching their plots in the very midst of that maiden lady's innocent and unsuspecting establishment.

"It was like hatching a wasp's nest inside the statue of a saint," he exclaimed; "but I can well believe it. It was just like them. They are as cunning as foxes, and as unscrupulous as—"

"Let me go on," she said, putting up her hand imperatively, "and tell it all now."

And hereupon she related her meeting with the Count, her grand-aunt's legacy, her last charge regarding her Aunt Nathalie, and her own vow.

From this she hurriedly sketched her life in Paris—her political friends and Bodisco, her manager and pursuer.

She then swiftly brought the narrative down to the present year, related the hold the Count had over her, the bribe for which she had sold herself and her happiness, her aunt's liberty, and then she paused at last abruptly and almost breathless.

"I am glad you have trusted me at last, Pauline. I will rid you of this monster, and if possible I will restore your aunt to liberty. You forget that I have some interest, that I am in the diplomatic service, that I have powerful friends at St. Petersburg. Be assured I shall strain every nerve on behalf of Nathalie Dormanoff. The first thing to be done is to postpone your marriage."

"How? I cannot, will not see him. I could not trust myself," she answered tremulously.

"No need to see him; sit down and write," pointing to a distant table. "I will post your letter. Say—what are you to say? Oh, that you have serious affairs to arrange, that your wedding must be postponed, and that you must beg him not to call here for the next three weeks."

"But he will!" she exclaimed hysterically. "He will be here by the next train."

"And if he is," returned Mr. Lorraine resolutely, "your servants can easily say 'not at home.' I myself will start for Russia to-morrow morning. I shall reach the capital, by rapid travelling, in five days. I will leave no stone unturned to release your aunt—nay, if possible, I will bring her back with me. Twenty years is a long sentence. The laws have relaxed of late. I have every confidence of success if—"

He paused; he did not give utterance to his thought. "And now, Pauline, that I share your secret—all your secrets, I hope you feel the load of your responsibilities lightened."

"I don't know. I am so unlucky always, only getting out of one trouble to fall into another, that I sometimes think, Oscar, that it would have been better for me and all my friends if I had never regained my senses, and remained always in that place!"

"Nonsense," he returned, scornfully; "your evil days are over; you have had rough, dark weather for many years; your star was not in the ascendant, but, believe me, Pauline, that after such storms there will be sunshine and peace; and now you may trust your affairs to me with the utmost confidence, and," quickly looking at his watch, "I must go, or I shall lose the last train. I hope by this day three weeks, at the very latest, to be here again. Good-bye."

Their hands clasped; there was no uncertainty in the eyes that met each other; they had no secrets between them; there was nothing to keep them apart now.

The three weeks had crawled by, and behold Pauline, whose impatience had known no limits, waiting alone in her victoria at the station for Oscar Lorraine.

She was regardless of appearances, she was reckless of Mrs. Grundy. She was counting the very seconds till the train came round the curve.

At last it was in sight—at last Oscar sprang out—out alone. Her heart sank. He said nothing beyond,—

"How do you do, Pauline?" till he was already seated beside her, and the brown coats were briskly trotting homewards in the anticipation of their evening corn.

"You see, Pauline, that I am alive," he said, very quietly. "I know, my dear, that you will be terribly disappointed, but it could not be helped. I was too late," taking her hand under cover of the rug. "Just four years too late. She had been set free by a higher power than the Czar. Her release came from him too late."

Pauline's tears were dropping fast.

"Oh, I had so built on seeing her—on making up to her for all those dreadful years. My mother's sister, I—I have thought so much—so much of her, and she never even heard of me! Oh, it is a cruel, cruel disappointment."

"To you, my poor Pauline, no doubt; but she is far happier than you could hope to make her. A pure Russian, as you are a pure Englishwoman, speaking now no language but her own—French and English long forgotten—worn down and enfeebled by years of toil and hardship, what would she have done in your life?"

"I made inquiries. She was well-known in Irkuth. She kept a small shop, and was noted for her charity, endurance, and faith."

"She never mourned at her hard lot. It had been, she declared, of her own choosing, and she never opened her lips on the subject of the past. No one knew of her former name or rank, save the authorities and the priest."

"She went by the name of 'White-haired Catherine,' and passed as what she proclaimed herself to be, 'a woman of the people.' No one guessed that she was that indomitable little conspirator, the Countess Nathalie Dormanoff."

"I procured for you her Prayer-book reliquary and a few simple, common articles that belonged to her. They are to follow me here. And now, Pauline, you see Bodisco in a still more glaring light."

"I have proof that he played two parts—as conspirator and a spy. He was well aware of Nathalie's fate; would have informed you of it ere you had left the church, no doubt, and laughed in your face."

The next day Count Bodisco himself appeared upon the scene and was admitted.

The interview was short and conclusive. Proofs of Nathalie's death were forthcoming—proofs that he was completely set aside were not wanting.

He was like some wild animal who finds at the last moment its prey snatched from its grasp.

He threw off his Russian veneer and displayed the traditional Tartar.

He threatened, he cursed, he even stamped in his impotent rage—for he was a man of immense capacity for spending money. His coffers were low.

He had reckoned on Pauline's roubles without the smallest uncertainty.

And he beheld them figuratively melting into thin air before his very eyes. Oh, that he had that Lorraine—alone, and by the throat. Oh, that he had Pauline once more under his heel!

"You have told him the secret," he screamed, at last; "you know your punishment, miserable woman—sooner or later our arm will find you, and it brings death."

"What society and which society are you talking of, you Government spy? I know you well; your confederates have found you out, the Government now know you. Try and show your face beyond the Russian frontier—I cannot wish you anything worse," said Lorraine, contemptuously.

"And as to secrets," put in Pauline, "I possess one of yours—the same that blighted my mother's life—the secret about your brother."

What ailed the Count now? He became white as death, he looked positively appalling. His jaw dropped, his eyes were strained on something above Pauline's head—what, they never knew; for, as if pursued by the whole contents of the lower regions let loose, he rushed to the door, out into the hall, clattered down the steps, and drove off in his waiting hansom, bidding the man to "Gallop—gallop," as if he were flying for his life.

Such was Ivan de Bodisco's exit. He was never seen again. There were rumours that he had his head swept off in a boiler explosion—that he had been identified and buried, but whether this was true or not was never precisely known.

Perhaps he and Count Villaini—fitting companions—have gone into partnership.

But stay, the Count is dead—really dead at last. He kept a grog-shop for some time in California, and drank half his own stock-in-trade, was knocked upon the head in some rowdy fight, and so perished.

Mattie and her sister live in genteel retirement in a fashionable seaside resort, occasionally attend bands on the Parade, and talk of "other days." Their sister makes them a handsome yearly allowance, but will never consent to see them.

Sophie, the maid, is now nurse to the eldest little Lorraine.

Mrs. Bitt has retired from the Asylum, and become housekeeper to her late lunatic servant.

Letty spends a goodly portion of time with her old friend, and talks, suspiciously, often, of a certain unmarried rector—and it would not surprise us to hear that she followed her friend's example, and became a bride for a second time.

As for Pauline, the real summer of her life had come at last. She finds Oscar Lorraine the realisation of her earlier dreams. They are as happy as the day is long, and she has nearly forgotten her old name of "Cinderella."

THE END.

THE PERSIANS gave names to every day in the month, just as we give them to days of the week.

AN OLD BACHELOR'S BLUNDER.

(Continued from page 583.)

It was on a lovely evening, after they had been for several months at Nice, when Gladys was sitting beneath a group of tall ilex trees in the garden of the lovely villa they occupied, that Mr. Allingham spoke again to her of their marriage.

"I don't want to hurry you, my dear," he said gently, as he saw Gladys shrink and tremble. "We will wait as long as you like. If you do not think you love me enough yet, let us put off our wedding for a little while longer; it is your happiness I think of and long for, my dear, let it be as you like, but if you can, the sooner you make up your mind and name the day, the better pleased I shall be."

"How kind you are!" said Gladys falteringly, looking up into his face with thankful eyes, "I feel I do not deserve half your goodness, Mr. Allingham."

"Dear child, do not say that, it is my happiness to try and make you happy, Gladys, and perhaps in days to come I may succeed," he replied. "Well! what do you say—when is it to be?"

Gladys paused and turned pale for one moment with a terrible yearning, she thought of Jim. Then she put the thought resolutely aside—that chapter in her life was closed. Even if Jim came back to her and begged her to forgive him, she would be obliged to refuse. She could never draw back now and wound the kind, true heart of the man beside her.

"I—when we return to England I shall be ready," she said in a low faltering voice. "And—oh! if I don't seem to love you as—some girls might—as I ought—forgive me—indeed—indeed I am not cold or ungrateful—but—but—I am such a poor little creature—not half good enough for you—oh! I hope that some day you will not think so too."

"Nay! that will never be—you must not fancy it, my dear," replied Mr. Allingham, looking down tenderly at her. "You know how I admire as well as love you; give me but a small bit of your heart, dear, and you will make me very happy."

And stooping, he kissed her cheek and left her.

She sat on in the evening light thinking deeply; the gay, laughing voices of her sisters reaching her at intervals from the house; then the sounds of voices—Fanny's pretty, bird-like soprano mingling with Alice's contralto, and the full sweet sounds of a tenor voice, round, and mellow, and full as Italian voices only are. The girls were happy—so happy! and Violet quite well again. Her mother was quite changed, too: the worried, anxious look had fled from her face; she was calm and pensive, and looked ten years younger than she had done in the bygone times when daily petty troubles ground her down to the dust, and took all the sweetness out of life. And all this they owed to Robert Allingham!

Well! if she was sacrificing her own will and inclinations, surely the reward was great—the reward of seeing those she loved happy!

And she would make Mr. Allingham happy; he should never know what it had cost her to become his wife. She would do her duty by him, he should never have a fault to find with her; she would be obedient and docile and do all in her power to please him.

And her love! Ah, would she ever be able to give him her love—to forget the past?

She sighed deeply and buried her face in her hands as she thought of it. And once again her whole soul rose up in revolt against the sacrifice she was about to make.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she murmured; "what shall I do! Oh, I cannot forget, I cannot! Oh, Jim, Jim—my love, my love!"

And as she raised her face from her hands her eyes fell on a tall form before her, the sight of which sent the blood surging to her brain in a hot flood.

Jim Beaufort stood in the shadow of the great ilex tree close to her.

CHAPTER VI.

SHE started up with a low cry of,—

"Jim! Jim!" and rushed forward as if to throw herself into his outstretched arms, then stopped, hesitated and recoiled, crouching down at last on the seat she had just quitted like some guilty, terrified thing.

"Yes, it is I, Gladys, my darling; it is I in the flesh, not my ghost!" he cried, coming forward and trying to take her in his arms. "Have I frightened you, dear? Oh, Gladys!" and he turned pale as she withdrew her hands from his grasp and shrank yet further from him. "It is not true what they told me, is it! Oh, tell me, it is not true!"

"Oh, Jim, Jim!" she moaned, "why have you come now—now that it is too late? why did you not come sooner? why did you not write all these months? why did you make me believe you had forgotten me?"

"Write! I wrote. I never let a fortnight go by without writing. What do you mean, darling? I have never forgotten you for a moment; not for an hour have you ever been out of my thoughts since I left you. I have longed—longed for this day; and oh, Gladys, I am rich now—rich, my darling! I can marry you at once! There is no need for us to wait any longer."

There was a slight rustling in the bushes as he spoke, but neither he nor she noticed it, and he went on,—

"I came home as soon as I heard of it," he went on, "only a month after we reached Chundapore on our return from the frontier. What! you did not know we had been on service? How is it you have never got my letters? Why did you never write? What do you mean by saying I have come too late, Gladys! Speak! for Heaven's sake don't look at me with that expression on your face! Have you ceased to love me, then? But, no! I swear you have not. I saw that as soon as my eyes met yours!"

Still she was silent, sitting white and motionless crouching in the corner of the seat in the pale moonlight.

"Speak, Gladys!" he continued, growing more and more agitated. "What has happened? I heard a report I could hardly credit at Matcham; yes, I've been to Matcham. I got your address there. Oh, Gladys, it is not true; it can't be true what they said, that you are engaged to another, a—"

"Hush!" she said hoarsely, "Yes, it is true, Jim."

There was a dead silence between them for a minute, their eyes were fixed on each other, and the misery in Gladys's face told Jim the truth. Engaged to another she might be, but her heart was his still!

"Gladys, what made you do it? how did they persuade you?" he faltered.

"They—they, mother, I mean, said you were tired of me, that you had forgotten me—and—you never wrote, never answered any of my letters," she replied in a dull, toneless voice.

"I tell you I wrote regularly," he replied passionately. "When did you last write to me, Gladys?" She told him.

"And who used to post your letters?" he asked.

"They went to the village in our post-bag, as usual," she replied, "why—why do you ask, Jim?"

"Ah!" he said shortly and bitterly, "I see, Gladys, there has been foul play, our letters have been stopped, been tampered with! Who did it?"

There was no reply, but her look of startled anguish as she gazed up into Jim's agitated face, told him that at last she understood!

"And you—you are engaged, going to be married soon," he said, slowly. "Gladys, you can't, you must not, you shall not. You love me, you are mine, I will not give you up to anyone. Who is this man? this—this robber, who?"

"Oh, hush! Jim, he is no robber; but the truest, noblest, kindest man that ever lived, do

not say anything against him. We owe everything to him, even Violet's life. You are right, I do not love him as I ought to love him! Oh! I have tried—tried hard to forget you, Jim, and to love him, but I could not, even though I believed you had forgotten me—but, I must be true to my promise, I must marry him—and—and we must part, Jim!"

"Part!" he said in a low, husky voice, "part! Gladys, my love—my darling, think! you cannot mean it! Now, too, when life might be so happy for us, without a care or a trouble! Part! it can't be, darling, think again!"

"It must be—oh! it must be, Jim," she answered, miserably. "Oh! don't you see, can't you understand! We owe everything to Mr. Allingham and he loves me. I cannot break his heart, I must keep my word!"

"How about my heart then!" he asked, bitterly, "do you think nothing of my sufferings! Gladys, I cannot give you up. I cannot part with you, again."

"Dear Jim, would you have me act dishonourably? would you have me break my promise!" she said falteringly.

"How about your promise to me!" he cried, "Surely I have the first claim on you, Gladys. I had your promise long before this man ever crossed your path!"

"He has been so noble, so kind, so generous, to us, Jim, how can I cast him aside?" she replied.

"And you will marry him without loving him, Gladys, think of that! can happiness follow—would it be right?" said Jim, earnestly; "pause for your own sake, if not for mine!"

"I—I don't know. I cannot tell," she replied, wringing her hands. "Oh! Jim, help me! I don't know what I ought to do—help me, for I am very, very unhappy. They say men understand honour better than women, tell me what I am bound in honour to do in this matter."

And she looked imploringly into Jim Beaufort's agitated face. For a moment he hesitated as if undecided what to answer, his face working with emotion, then he spoke.

"I will tell you what I think," he said, slowly, "what I think you are bound in honour to do. I think you owe it to this man, who, you say, is good and noble, to tell him the whole truth, Gladys, to tell him you have been deceived, that you believed me false and have now discovered your mistake; you should tell him exactly how things are between us, and then you should abide by his decision, act according to his wishes. If he still insists on your performing your part of the bargain—Well—you are right, we must part, but oh! it is hard—hard!"

And he turned away with a heart-broken gesture.

"Yes, he should be told. I will tell him," replied Gladys, "you are right, Jim. It will be a hard task to pain him, to wound his kind heart, for oh! he is the best and truest of men! but it is right he should be told. To-morrow—nay, to-night, he shall know all."

"No need to tell him, my dear child, he knows all now," said a clear, calm voice that caused them both to start.

And Mr. Allingham stepped out of the shadow into the moonlight.

"Forgive me, Gladys—forgive me, Mr. Beaufort, for being an unintentional eaves-dropper. I heard your cry (turning to Gladys) as I stood on the terrace yonder, and came to see if anything were wrong. Your first words told me all the truth, my dear—nay, do not look so grieved, so ashamed! There is nothing you need be ashamed of, I am thankful that I heard them, and that I have heard all."

"You—you—are not angry, you forgive me then?" stammered Gladys.

"Forgive! I have nothing to forgive, my dear," he answered, kindly; but his voice was full of sadness. "I have often suspected this, but —"

"I will leave you," interrupted Jim, coming forward. "I have intruded too long already, and—"

"Nay, excuse me, it is I who should retire," said Robert Allingham, with a grave sad smile. "Mr. Beaufort my first wish and desire in life is to make Gladys happy."

"I do not doubt it," replied Jim, miserably. "She has told me you—"

"And I feel that there is only one way in which I can do so," he went on without heeding the interruption, "the only means by which her happiness can be secured, is by my resigning her to you, Mr. Beaufort. She loves you. Our engagement was a mistake, you have more right to her than I have. It was her love I coveted and was trying to win; it never can be mine. Nay! do not weep, my child, if I cannot be anything nearer to you I can always be your friend! You are grieved, sorry for me, I know, but be comforted. To see you happy is my greatest wish, and it will be gratified. Mr. Beaufort, let us be friends."

He held out his hand to Jim as he spoke, and then turning to Gladys, who was weeping softly, put her into his arms.

"You are far better suited to her than I, or any old bachelor like me," he said, "and I feel confident you will make her happy. Good-bye, Heaven bless you both."

And turning, he walked away quickly.

It was not difficult to reconcile Mrs. Morant to the change in her daughter's prospects, now that she found Jim was rich, instead of being the penniless detrimental she had believed.

Two months later their marriage took place, and the only tears shed that day were shed by Gladys, when a letter from Mr. Allingham, accompanied by a beautiful set of diamonds reached her, telling her that business had called him back to Australia, and that when she received it he would be already on board ship.

"I shall think of you," it concluded, "and pray for your happiness, which I am thankful to think has not been wrecked by an old BACHELOR'S BLUNDER."

[THE END.]

A DOUBLE-DYED VILLAIN.

—♦—

"ENGAGED to Dalzell Kenwood, is she?" said Carl Knighton, carelessly. "Well, I wish her joy of her bargain!"

He was a dark-faced, handsome young man of the Spanish type, with large, lustrous eyes and a silken black moustache, and he spoke the words after a *débonnaire* fashion; but Rosalind, his sister, detected the false ring in them, and exchanged a laughing glance with Nina Ford, her dearest friend.

"How coolly he takes it," said she, "when all the world knows that he was madly in love with Zoe Atwater!"

Nina laughed, but her subtle gray eye never abated its vigilant watch on Knighton's face, and a deep rose burned on either cheek.

"Mr. Kenwood has won the belle of the season," said she, in a soft, low voice. "Not that I ever fancied Miss Atwater. Her style is too statuesque for me. I like some animation in a woman. You never really cared for her, Mr. Knighton, did you?"

"If I really had," retorted Knighton, with some animus, "do you believe Kenwood could have won her?"

"It seems that he has," drily observed Rosalind.

"You think so?" he sneered.

"Appearances would certainly confirm that fact!" laughed Rosalind.

Knighton flung his cigarette out of the window. "Well, time will show," said he, tugging at his moustache, after a Mephistophelian fashion. "In the meanwhile, I'll undertake to give each of you girls a diamond brooch on the day that Zoe Atwater is married to Dalzell Kenwood!"

Rosalind danced lightly up and down.

"Oh, what fun!" she cried, her merry black eyes dancing in unison with the sway of her supple figure. "I've always longed for a diamond brooch. Zoe's a darling, but she can get lots of other lovers, and I never can have but one chance for a diamond brooch!"

While Miss Ford lifted her eyebrows, satirically.

"Mr. Knighton seems very sure of his promises,"

said she. "It is as he says—time alone will reveal the actual trend of affairs."

As it chanced, Carl Knighton met Miss Atwater at a party that very evening—a fair, golden-tressed vision, like some dream of Norseland beauty.

There was no especial point in Zoe's personality upon which one could expatiate, but she possessed some strange magnetic spell of attraction that won all hearts, and Knighton's tongue seemed almost paralyzed as he spoke a few conventional words of congratulation.

"It's so kind of you!" said Zoe, in her pretty, artless way. "I always knew that you and Dalzell were old schoolmates and friends."

As she turned away to greet a handsome young naval officer, the flash of a diamond ring on her engagement finger seemed to strike across Knighton's eyeballs like a cymeter of fire.

"Yes," murmured Dalzell Kenwood, with a smile, "and a precious scapegrace he was, schoolmates, yes; friends, no! I'm not one of the sort that likes to play with edged tools. Nevertheless, in consideration of all that he has lost, and I have gained, I'll try to forget those old times. People always hinted that his father was a Spanish pirate and his mother a fortune-teller."

Zoe laughed.

"Oh, Dal," said she, "I never knew before that men could be gossips, as well as women!"

"They're capital at the business," said Kenwood, with gravity.

Zoe Atwater's engagement was scarcely a week old, when one day her maid came tiptoeing softly upstairs.

"There's a very respectable old woman down stairs, miss, asking to see you," said she, lowering her voice to a mysterious cadence.

Zoe's fair face clouded over slightly. Dalzell had just departed on a brief business tour to the South, and this was her first delicious love letter to him.

She laid down her tiny pearl-handled pen, with its diamond tip.

"I'm particularly engaged to-day, Marie," said she. "I can see no one."

"Yes, miss, I know," said Marie, crimping the ruffle of her apron with her fingers, "but she is so very persistent—quite a respectable body, too—and I think—I'm not sure, miss, but I think it has something to do with Mr. Kenwood."

A charming glow suffused Zoe's face.

"Oh, why didn't you say so at first?" cried she. "Tell her to come up immediately. Perhaps it's some message that he omitted to leave—or maybe— But go, Marie—go at once!"

Marie obeyed, and presently returned, ushering into her mistress's blue-and-silver boudoir a stout, respectable female in a stiffly-starched print dress, a white apron and a black bonnet, with the edge bent a little askew, under its weight of scarlet cotton roses and crumpled leaves.

On her hands she wore cotton gloves, and she carried a flat market basket and a gingham umbrella, faded in streaks by its last encounter with the rain.

She dropped a curtsy.

Miss Atwater rose from her low writing-chair, with a soft frown of white cashmere and Valenciennes lace, while she secretly wondered whether this were a visitant from her Sunday-school district, or a representative of the model-dwelling houses she sometimes passed through in the cause of sweet charity.

Was she a washerwoman, or a hired nurse? Or perhaps the grandmother of one of those ideal "bad boys" who could not be made to take interest in church picnics or model gymnasiums, but obstinately preferred the gutters instead?

"Good-morning!" said she, with the soft graciousness that was part of her nature. "I don't seem quite to remember who you are."

"No, miss, it can't be expected as you should," said the stout old woman, clearing her husky throat. "You're writing a letter, miss. Praps it's to Mr. Dalzell Kenwood?"

Zoe looked at her in surprise—perhaps with a little offence.

"Oh, miss," hurriedly spoke the woman, depositing her market basket on the floor and

pulling out a red-bordered pocket-handkerchief. "I niver would ha' dared to come here without I was dead certain Dalzell Kenwood were gone. But it's only natural I should want to see the fine lady he's to marry one o' these days, though he's forbid me iver to let on as I'm anythink to him!"

And she buried her blunt nose in the red kerchief, with a sniff.

"Oh, I understand!" said Zoe, pulling forward a chair, into which her visitor dropped. "You are his old nurse—or perhaps one of the Kenwood family servants?"

"No, miss," said the woman. "I'm his mother."

"His—mother!"

Zoe started back.

"Don't think, miss, as I've come to beg," said the old woman, with some dignity. "I ain't a lady, as no one knows better than myself, but I've allays kep' myself respectable and decent, an' not a penny owin' to no man. I'm an office-cleaner, miss, by business, with a very good connection, an' I don't quite know why it is as Dalzell's so unwilling to have his good lady know about me. Says I to him, 'My son,' says I, 'if she's the person I take her for, she won't despise you for having a mother as has worked to make a gentleman of you. I ain't one of the interfering kind,' says I, 'an' I means to keep mysen to mysen. But I would like to see the bonny bride says I. But, 'No,' says he, 'mother,' says he, 'there's no one draws the line like an American lady, an' I'd be ashamed,' says he, 'to have her know as you was a workin' woman. So that's the reason, miss, as I've waited till he was gone—humbly beggin' as you'll excuse the liberty—just for one look at your blessed pretty face. For a mother's a mother, miss, an' she has a mother's feelins.'"

And once more she curtained and hid her face in her red-edged handkerchief with an audible sniff and gurgle.

All this time Zoe's eyes had grown larger, bluer, and more startled, her cheeks paler. A strange quiver came to her lips.

"Do you mean," she said, "that he—that Dalzell was ashamed of you?"

"A fine gentleman with a college education can't be expected to be proud of a mother as makes her livin' by cleanin' offices, miss," said the woman. "Praps it ain't natural as he should. He was allays a good lad, though. And as I ain't no wish to intrude where I ain't wanted, miss, I'll bid you a very good-by. It was only that I wanted to see what you was like, miss."

Zoe looked after the stout, retreating figure as it trundled downstairs with a pang of shame—an ache which she could not analyze.

"I—I should have treated her differently," she thought. "I should have offered her refreshments—I should, perhaps, have kissed her!" with a shudder, as she remembered the blotchy complexion, the blunt nose and the red-bordered handkerchief. "Dalzell's—mother! Now I come to think of it, I always supposed his mother dead, though he never told me so in words and sentences. And all this time she is a poor working woman like this, and he with his cigars and carriages and careless talk of money, as if he were a millionaire! Oh, who could have dreamed of perfidy like this!"

She set her little pearly teeth together and tore up the half-written sheets of that sweet first love letter.

"It must be quite different from that," said she—"the note that is to tell him our engagement must end! For I never, never could respect a man who has deceived me—or a man who is ashamed of his honest, hard-working mother!"

The sweet, flower-like face fell into her hands, tears rained down like diamond showers, and with every tear the knell of a dead hope was sounded.

Poor little blue-eyed Zoe—to her this was the very bitterness of death!

"I've done it, Mr. Knighton, and it was the worst an' meanest job I ever done!"

Carl Knighton was lounging at his office desk,

his hat on the back of his head, his feet thrust deep into the white pile of an Angora rug.

He turned quickly at the sound of the stout old dame's voice.

"Well," said he, "what did she say?"

"Say? She didn't say much; but I'd sooner ha' thrust a knife into a lamb's throat. It was a cruel thing to do, Mr. Knighton, and if I didn't owe you money for what my poor lad stole out of your till, and if you didn't threaten to give him up to the law if I didn't do this for you, I'd ha' said no, that I would. For I've got feelings, sir, if I am a poor working woman."

"Better your feelings!" said Knighton, contemptuously. "You've done the job, and you've bought that precious son of yours off from ten years in prison. We're square, so far. Now let me hear no more of your nonsense!"

And he smiled grimly as he thought of the effect this ruse would produce on Dalzell Kenwood's hopes.

"Zoe is absolutely Quixotic in her ideas as to honour and chivalry," thought he; "nor does any woman like to realize that she has been deceived. Dally's cake is all dough by this time, and who knows but that Mr. Carl Knighton's trump card may come uppermost one of these days!"

And his smile, as he stared up at the ceiling, with both hands clasped behind his black curly head, was more Mephistophelian than ever.

But love, the gentle god, takes care of his own, and so it chanced that the next morning, while Zoe was still crying over the letter that was to blight all Kenwood's bright hopes, a missive arrived from the true knight himself—a missive brimming over with love and tenderness, which bore within its folds a scented sprig of white jasmine.

"I picked this little blossom, darling Zoe, beside my mother's grave," he wrote, "the dear young Southern mother who died when I was a child. If she could have known you, dearest! But let this white, star-like flower be the same to you as her blessing!"

"It's—very—strange!" said Zoe, her blue eyes brimming over with tears.

Just then Marie came in.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, miss," said she, "but it's that stout old woman again, and she won't take 'no' for an answer. I never saw anyone so pushing in all my life."

Zoe caught up the spray of white jasmine with a jealous hand as the old woman in the crumpled bonnet came in, weeping and excited.

There had been an accident in the cartridge factory down town at which her son worked, and he had been suddenly killed.

"It's a judgment on me," she bewailed herself, wringing her hands, "because I told a wicked lie to shield him! And now Heaven has punished me. But it's Mr. Knighton—the judgment might have fell on, and I'll clear my soul by telling the truth at last. I never see Mr. Dalzell Kenwood in my life, and the story of my being his mother was all a put-up tale as Mr. Knighton bribed me to tell to make trouble. But I'm punished—yes, the Lord's hand is heavy on me at last!"

And she fell in a dead faint on the floor.

So Zoe's second letter to Dalzell was destroyed also.

When that young man returned from his foreign trip, he went to demand a reckoning at the hands of Carl Knighton, but in vain. That enterprising worthy had closed his law office and gone to some distant town, the name not specified.

And on the day of Zoe Atwater's wedding, Rosalind Knighton looked ruefully at Miss Ford. "People don't always get their deserts in this world, Nina," said she. "Here's Zoe married to Mr. Kenwood, and we haven't received our diamond brooch."

"No," murmured Nina.

But her loss had been greater far than that of her volatile friend, for she had secretly loved the handsome scamp who had absconded.

"I knew he was a villain," she mused. "I know he would have broken my heart even had I become his wife; but—I loved him!"

FACETIE.

MR. GAILY: "You know man proposes——" Miss Waldo: "No, I don't; I've only heard that he does; I've had no practical experience."

AUNT: "Is your sister improving in her music?" Small Nephew: "I fancy so. The people next door have decided not to move."

SALVATIONIST: "If you swear at that horse, you'll never get to heaven." Cabby: "Yes, an' if I don't swear at it, I'll never get to the Bank."

"Here is a joke, Mr. Editor, that I'll guarantee was never in print before." Editor (after reading it): "Don't doubt your word in the least, sir."

Waiter (yelling down the kitchen tube): "Hey, Alphonse! make that chop a steak." "Secret! Vat you tink! I'm a chef; not a magician!"

SHE: "You haven't shown this ring to a soul, have you?" He: "No, darling. Why, I only succeeded in getting it back from the other girl an hour ago!"

"Do you take this man for better or for worse?" asked the minister. "I can't tell until I have had him for a little while," returned the bride.

"Well, doctor, what is the condition of the burglar's victim?" Doctor: "One of his wounds is absolutely fatal, but the other two are not dangerous, and can be healed."

AUTHOR: "I'm troubled with insomnia. I lie awake at night, hour after hour, thinking about my literary work." Friend: "Why don't you get up and read portions of it?"

YOUNG AUTHOR (who thinks himself famous): "I believe I should enjoy my vacation better if I could go incognito." Friend: "Good idea. Travel under your *nom de plume*."

LADY: "Now, little one, what would you say if I were to give you these? Would you say these are good oranges, or these are good oranges?" Street Urchin: "How kin I tell till I suck 'em!"

ISAACSTEIN: "I vos tired of life. Gif me some poison, and so I will kill myself." Chemist (jocularly): "All right. What do you want—arsenic or strychnine?" Isaacstein: "Vich vos der cheapest?"

JUDGE (sternly, to female witness): "How do you make out, madam, that you are only thirty-five, when you admit that your daughter is thirty?" Mrs. O'Toole: "Och! sure, yer honour, she's me daughter by me furest husband."

MISS DE STYLE: "By the way, count, it is very awkward, but I do not know your name."

Russian Count: "Would you like to hear it?" Miss de Style: "Most certainly."

Russian Count: "Den, if you haf ten minutes to spare, sit town and I vill tell you."

LORD H.: "Miss Flypp—er, Mabel, deah, vill you marvy me?" "Yes, love." "Er, won't you tell me what to do now, aw! So unexpected, you know. Nevaw accepted before, you know, Mabel, and—aw—I'm somewhat at a loss how to proceed."

HOTEL CLERK: "Your name, sir, please?" Tourist: "Chumley." Clerk: "How do you spell it?" Tourist: "C-h-o-l-m-o-n-d-e-l-e-y."

(hotly) "how do you spell your own?" Clerk (excitedly): "J-o-w-l-a-g-u-a-e-s." Tourist: "What do you call it?" Clerk: "Jones."

A LITTLE BOY was coming home with his mother from church, when he heard her saying that the sermon was not worth much. The little boy immediately turned round and said, "Oh, mother, what could you expect for a half-penny!"

OVERHEARD at a Sunday-school treat. Teacher (to little boy): "You don't seem to be getting on very well with the pork pies, Johnny." Johnny (hesitatingly): "No, mum." Teacher: "Have you had sufficient then, Johnny?" Johnny: "Well it ain't exactly that mum, but you see I works where they makes 'em."

"DID you steal the complainant's coat?" asked the magistrate of a seedy individual who was arraigned before him. "I decline to gratify the morbid curiosity of the public by answering that question," responded the seedy individual, with a scornful glance at the reporters.

IRATE VISITOR: "I call this a downright fraud! You advertise on your bills, 'The Most Remarkable Dwarf in the World,' and he turns out to be 5 feet 5 inches high!" Bland Showman: "Exactly so, sir. That's just what's so remarkable about him. He's the tallest dwarf on record!"

A STUDENT at a medical college was under examination. The instructor asked him: "Of what cause, specifically, did the people die who lost their lives at the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii?" "I think they died of an eruption, sir," answered the student. "Go up! young man, go up!" was the reply.

MR. SLEMPURSE (feeling his way): "Your charming daughter tells me that she is an excellent cook and housekeeper." Old Lady (calmly): "Yes, I have had her carefully taught, for I have always held that no lady who does not understand housekeeping can properly direct a retinue of servants."

WEATHER PROPHECY: "How are the indications to-night?" Assistant: "Mighty uncertain. I hardly know what kind of a report to send out." Weather Prophet: "Nothing easier. Make it 'fine weather, with local rains and thunderstorms.' That's always safe. If it's fine, we hit it right; and, if it rains, that's one of our local storms. See!"

"I AM going to paint this cottage of yours," remarked an artist to a brawny Scotswoman the other day whom he met whilst rambling in the North. "Aun glad tae hear it, for it hinsa been dune for many a lang day, and I've been at the laird ower an' ower agin, but he never heeded." (After a pause): "But, loah, mon, whaur's yer pail an' brush?"

WHILE out shooting in the rural districts of the Highlands a short time back, I found that my watch had stopped. Entering a farmhouse, and noticing an old grandfather's clock, I looked at it, and exclaimed: "Your clock is surely wrong!" "Naething wrang wi't ava," answered the old farmer; "it's you that doesna understand it. When the wee haun's straight up, and the big haun's straight down, it strikes ten; but the right time's five o'clock. After that," he continued, "ye've naething to doo but calculate."

SCENE: A street outside an important race-course. A rather deaf gentleman, putting his head out of a window, inquires from a boy who was running by which horse had won the race. "Postponed!" yelled the boy. "Who was second?" shouted the man to the urchin, who was now in the distance. "On account of the frost!" bawled out the boy. "Great Scott! who was third?" again asked the man. "You old fool," answered the boy, "they have not run." "Well, I'm cornered; three blooming outsiders, and the favourites not in it," grunted the man, as he withdrew his head.

It was raining its very hardest the other night—fairly tumbling down in pailfuls, and there was a rare old struggle to secure the inside seats in the omnibuses at the General Post Office as they came up. A red "Angel" had just got its full complement, and all poor hard-worked City men going home to bath the children, when an elderly lady of some fifty winters—the summers did not appear to have had much influence upon her—got aboard. She was a hard-looking customer, and, as she peered up and down those two rows of masculine faces, with the light of a sickly paraffin lamp shining upon them, a sneer came across her lips—a nasty, bitter sneer. But they all sat tight: not one of them offered to give her his seat. Then with a witheringly scornful smile, she said, "If any of you miserable snobs are waiting for me to sit on your laps you're sucked in, for, thank evvings, I'm a lady!" A cold shudder passed over the assembly, and a dread that she might not after all be in earnest caused eight young fellows to hop out of the bus before it had gone a hundred yards.

SOCIETY.

The third son of the Duke of Teck will shortly join the army as subaltern. It is not yet certain to what regiment he will be gazetted.

DURING the second week in October the Duke and Duchess of York are to be the guests of Mr. Graham Vivian at Clyne Park, near Swansea, for a few days.

THE Grand Duke Alexis of Russia will probably come to England early in November for a short time on a visit to the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham.

THE King and Queen of Denmark's party at Bernstorff included the King of the Hellenes, the Princess of Wales and her daughters, and the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland and their children.

REPORTS are current of an engagement between the King of Greece's pretty eldest daughter, Princess Marie of Greece, and the Prince of Naples, heir to the Italian throne. The young princess belongs, however, to the Orthodox Greek Church, and the Prince of Naples is a Roman Catholic.

It is generally expected in Court circles that either Sir Fleetwood Edwards or Colonel Bigge will be appointed Master of the Household by the Queen, in the place of Sir John Cowell. There are a large number of candidates for the post, but it requires special qualifications, and Sir John Cowell was not an easy man to follow.

THE Duchess of Connaught is rapidly becoming the most popular Aldershot Commander's wife that ever had the honour of holding such a position in the big camp, for Her Royal Highness is ever ready to do good, and she has quite got over the delicate shyness which she was once noted for.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales are not expected to take up their residence at Sandringham for the winter until quite the end of this month, and it is understood that the large house parties at the Hall, which have been discontinued since the death of the Duke of Clarence, are to be resumed this season. The first set of guests will arrive on Saturday, November 3rd, and there will then be a succession of visitors until Monday the 12th, when the Prince is going to Chatsworth on a four days' visit to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire.

THE Queen was accompanied on the journey to Scotland by Princess Henry of Battenberg, Prince Arthur of Connaught, and Princesses Margaret and Patricia of Connaught, with the children of Prince and Princess Henry of Battenberg. The Queen much enjoys having children about to enjoy the free, out-of-door, and healthy life in the Highlands, and as the Duchess of Albany is at Birkhall with the young Duke and Princess Alice of Albany, there is quite a large group of Royal cousins to enjoy games, expeditions, and walks and rides together.

THERE are no partridges at Balmoral, and very few grouse, the ptarmigan being the most plentiful bird on the Royal demesne, where deer-stalking in the forests and the roe deer-shooting in Abergeldie and Birkhall woods are the great sporting features. The Queen's table is principally supplied with partridges from Sandringham (for there are not many either at Windsor or at Osborne), but this year a large box arrived at Balmoral from Haddo House, which had been sent by order of Lord Aberdeen, who had telegraphed his instructions on the subject from Canada.

THE Duke and Duchess of Cumberland will probably come to England from Denmark on a brief visit to the Queen at Balmoral when the Princess of Wales returns home. The Duke and Duchess have been cordially invited by the Emperor and Empress of Russia to go to St. Petersburg in January, to attend the wedding of the Czarévitch and the Princess Alix of Hesse. The Emperor William is anxious to have a meeting with the Duke of Cumberland; and it is probable that the Emperor Francis Joseph (as the intimate friend of both) will invite them, and the King of Saxony, to his shooting lodge in Styria.

STATISTICS.

It is estimated that on an average each penny in circulation changes hands eleven times a week.

THE British Museum has no less than seven hundred theological books written concerning the creation of the world.

THE burning of Moscow by the Russians in order to drive out the French, caused an estimated loss of over £24,000,000.

THERE is about twice as much beef as mutton consumed in these islands; an authority declares that the average consumption of beef is 1 lb. per head weekly, and that of mutton $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. per head.

THE world's tunnels are estimated to number about eleven hundred and forty-two, with a total length of five hundred and fourteen miles. There are about one thousand railroad tunnels, ninety canal tunnels, forty conduit tunnels, and twelve subaqueous tunnels, having an aggregate length of about three hundred and fifty miles, seventy miles, eighty-five miles, and nine miles respectively.

GEMS.

LOVE cannot be hid anymore than light, and least of all when it shines forth in action, when ye exercise yourselves in the labour of love, in beneficence of every kind.

DUTY is never uncertain at first. It is only after we have got involved in the mazes and sophistries of wishing that things were otherwise than they are that it seems indistinct.

AMONG the essential qualifications of the gentleman are dignity, a quiet repose of manner, diplomacy and that thoughtful regard for the feelings of others, that make it almost out of the question for her to do a rude or discourteous act.

NEVER mourn over past follies. Instead of this, make a mental entry on the ledger of life to the effect that having done this, you have learnt the folly of that particular act, and, having done so, are stronger and better for the wisdom acquired. Let every error arm you against future mistakes and follies.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LOBSTER CROQUETTES.—Chop the lobster very fine; mix with pepper, salt, bread crumbs, and a little parsley. Moisten with cream and a small piece of butter. Shape into small pyramids, dip in egg, roll in bread crumbs and fry.

CLEANSING DRINKS.—Two ounces each bicarbonate soda, cream of tartar, tartaric acid, four ounces lump sugar, and half ounce magnesia is the approximate constituents of a good draught. Thoroughly dry each on clean plates, pulverise in pestle and mortar, and incorporate through a fine sieve. Bottle tightly in dry bottles, with wide mouths.

EGG TOAST.—Put the yolks of four eggs and the whites of two with four ounces of melted butter. Beat them well together, then stir them over the fire two or three minutes, or until they are just set. Make some slices of thin, delicately brown toast, spread anchovy paste over it, then put on the egg mixture with a fork. Cut the toast into pieces, and serve very hot.

COCOANUT TABLET.—One coconut, two pounds white sugar, two teacups of water or coconut milk. Get the coconut, crack off the shell, first opening one of the holes at the top and pouring the milk into a cup, then pare all the brown skin off, and grate it; put the sugar and the two teacups of milk and water or water alone in a pan and boil for a few minutes, then add the nut and boil for about ten minutes longer; try then if it is thick enough; put a teaspoonful in a cup of cold water, and if you can gather it into a soft lump it is ready; pour on a buttered dish, cut in squares, and it will soon be hard.

MISCELLANEOUS.

FLYING frogs are common in Borneo.

THE entire empire of Persia has but one vessel.

A MOLE eludes danger by having four or five entrances to its home.

THE earliest book in which copperplate engravings were used was issued in 1417.

THE roar of Niagara has been phonographed, and may be heard in any part of America for a small fee.

THE most unhealthy city in Europe is Barcelona, Spain. The number of deaths there at present exceeds the number of births.

THE laws of China count getting out of temper in public as an offence, the punishment for it being five days' imprisonment.

THERE are three Khans—Khiva, Khokand and Bokhara—who date the origin of their families back to the Turkish invasion of Europe.

ONE of the most stupendous projects now before the engineering world is the construction of a storage reservoir in the Nile above Egypt.

A CURIOUS article of export from Pakhoi, according to the British consul there, is dried lizards. They are used for making a medicine called "lizard wine"; it is said to be a tonic.

A MOVEMENT is on foot to drain the delta of the Danube and restore it to its condition of five centuries ago, when it was covered with forests and fertile fields.

THE Empress of Russia has a perfumery fountain for her toilet. She presses the button of any odour desired, and the fountain does the rest.

ONE of the funeral customs of Korea is, to say the least of it, peculiar. It is a social law which compels all loyal Koreans to wear a white hat for three years after the death of one of the royal family.

A CURIOUS fish is found in the rivers of Guiana and Surinam. It is called the anabiet, and has in each eye two pupils, an upper and a lower one. When the fish is swimming, it keeps the upper optic, which protrudes above the head, out of the water.

IN the treasure room of the Maharajah of Baroda is stored a carpet which cost £200,000. It is only ten by six feet in size, but is woven from strings of pure pearls, with a centre and corner circle of diamonds. It took three years to make it, and was intended as a gift to a certain Mohammedan beauty.

THE Egyptians invented the papyrus 1730 B.C., the Chinese silk paper toward the middle of the seventh century, B.C. The Chinese are also credited with the invention of ink and pencils; but in Europe the iron stylus and the reed continued to be employed until the time when the goose-quill was first pressed into service.

A SPECIAL mouthpiece for the public telephones has been introduced in Germany with the object of avoiding the spread of diseases carried by the condensed moisture of the breath. A pad of a large number of discs of paper, with a hole in the middle, is inserted in the mouthpiece, and the upper disc of paper is torn off after every conversation.

A PAD with some fashionable London women is to have a dress album. This consists of a large blank book into which is pasted a two-inch square of every gown bought by the owner. The data recorded are the date of the purchase and its first wearing. As an offset opposite these entries are the no less interesting ones of the cost price and the dressmaker's bill for the same.

THOUGH the petrel is swift, the frigate bird is far swifter. Seamen generally believe that the frigate bird can start at daybreak with the trade winds from the coast of Africa, and perch the same night upon the American shore. Whether this is a fact has not yet been conclusively determined, but it is certain that this bird is the swiftest of winged creatures, and is able to fly, under favourable conditions, 200 miles an hour.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

H. B.—London or Liverpool.
 CURIO.—Take them to some dealer.
 C. S.—Recommendations are never given.
 SCHWARTZ.—We never offer medical advice.
 HUGHES.—20th April, 1871, was a Thursday.
 D. R.—You are liable to pay for the machine.
 DEBORA.—It is purely a matter for agreement.
 INQUIRY.—We do not know the address asked for.
 FRANCES.—You will find the lines in Scott's "Marion."
 BARNABY.—You can procure either through a bookseller.
 IN ANXIETY.—We do not answer questions by private letter.
 B. G.—The property would go to the wife and daughters.
 J. P.—There is no public institution available for such cases.
 DEFECTION.—There is no certain means of removing tattoo marks.
 JANET.—It is a quotation from Sterne's "Sentimental Journey."
 CHARLIE.—Some regiments of the Guards are always on duty in London.
 B. D. C.—Nearly all the world's supply of opium comes from India.
 ONE IN GREAT TROUBLE.—We cannot enter into the matter. Obtain legal help.
 HOUSEHOLDER.—If the house was taken by the month, a month's notice is enough.
 DEVILISH JEAN.—It is almost impossible to remove them without leaving scars.
 MAY.—A marriage of first cousins is better avoided as a rule.
 ROSE.—You can only get through a solicitor. The cost to you would be very little.
 LOUIE.—To make whites of eggs beat quickly, put in a small pinch of salt.
 CONSTANT READER.—Author is now commonly applied to a female writer as well as to a male.
 S. K.—Copper money is legal tender up to one shilling and silver up to forty shillings.
 LONDON.—All you need do is to send her a bouquet of flowers, with your card stuck on it.
 SILAS J.—It is quite illegal to produce or permit card-playing of any kind in public-houses.
 S. N.—The law says that child takes its nationality from its father, no matter where it is born.
 M. W.—Apply to the School Board, stating qualifications. There is an examination, we believe.
 RALPH.—You had better consult a bookseller. The work is, we believe, out of print.
 OLD READER.—You must make personal application to the Registrar. It is perfectly legal.
 CINDERELLA.—Yours is a very common complaint, and there is really no remedy. All you can do is to be careful in what you eat and avoid all quick medicines.
 V. G. W.—If the place was taken at so much a year, that means six months' notice, ending with the date of entry.
 C. A. W.—A mere local application is washing the hands in very hot water containing half-a-dozen drops of carbolic acid.
 GERTRUDE.—The name was originally said to be "grace widow." The precise history of the term is not known.
 DOUBTFUL PAIR.—You acted in an honourable and straightforward manner in writing to the young woman in the way you did.
 ARCHIE.—There are several papers devoted to sporting matters, which contain the data for which you are seeking.
 L. A. J.—Unless there was a clear agreement for a month's trial, the servant must give a month's notice in the usual way.
 BOBBIE.—Feed your tortoise on any tender green stuffs, such as lettuce, leaves or ripe fruit; a little milk occasionally; keep it warm.
 ANXIOUS FOR JUSTICE.—If you lay poison in your ground, and poison your neighbours' cats, you can be proceeded against for the value of the cats.
 FRISCHILLA.—A domestic servant may be required to complete the ordinary day's work on the day on which her notice terminated.
 DISTRESSED MOTHER.—Any attempt to arrest the growth with medicine may be disastrous, possibly even fatal.
 WONDERING ONE.—"A drug in the market" has reference to any commodity that remains on hand, or is not saleable.
 BUSINESSLIKE.—It must be a matter of arrangement with the persons with whom the engagement was contracted.

HARASSED.—A little judicious inquiry among your friends in your own or other towns should obtain details.

MARTHA.—Emery powder and sweet oil. Paraffin oil may be used at first, but you had better finish with a little sweet oil.

PUZZLED ARTHUR.—Counterpoint is a blending of melodies, while harmony is a blending of tones to produce one melody; altogether separate studies.

W. R.—An agreement made on your behalf while you were under the age of twenty-one is not binding upon you after that age.

A. S. B.—The husband is legally entitled to the custody of the child, unless it is too young to be safely removed from the mother.

CLAUDE.—All that can be done is to touch it daily with a little oil, and wait for nature to assist removal by supplanting the old skin with new.

WRETCHED WIFE.—No length of absence on the part of husband or wife legalises another marriage. A divorce must be obtained to do that.

AGNES.—The yellow appearance is given to outside doorsteps by rubbing them with ordinary bathbrick instead of sandstone or pipeclay.

RODRIGO.—The passage is in Addison's "Cato"—
 "Tis not in mortals to command success,
 But we'll do more, Sempronius; we'll deserve it."

BERYL.—Fanciful styles are sometimes indulged in by people of conservative tastes, but the plainest paper is always in good form, whatever the caprice of fashion.

IN THE DOWN-HILL OF LIFE.

In the down-hill of life, when I find I'm declining,
 May my lot no less fortunate be
 Than a snug elbow-chair can afford for reclining,
 And a cot that o'erlooks the wide sea;
 With an ambling pad-pony to pace o'er the lawn,
 While I carol away idle sorrow,
 And as bright as the lark that each day hails the dawn,
 Look forward with hope for to-morrow.

With a porch at my door, both for shelter and shade,
 Too,
 As sunshine or rain may prevail,
 And a small spot of ground for the use of the spade,
 Too,
 With a barn for the use of the flail;
 A cow for my dairy, a dog for my game,
 And a purse when a friend wants to borrow,
 I'll envy no nabob his riches or fame,
 Nor what honours await him to-morrow.

From the bleak northern blast may my cot be completely
 Secured by a neighbourly bill;
 And at night may repose steal upon me more sweetly
 By the sound of a murmuring rill;
 And while peace and plenty I find at my board,
 With a heart free from sickness and sorrow,
 With my friends may I share what to-day may afford,
 And let them spread the table to-morrow.

And when I at last must throw off this frail covering
 Which I've worn for three-score years and ten,
 On the brink of the grave I'll not seek to keep hovering,
 Nor my thread wish to spin o'er again;
 But my face in the glass I'll serenely survey,
 And with smiles count each wrinkle and furrow;
 As this old, worn-out stuff, which is threadbare to-day,
 May become everlasting to-morrow.

J. C.

FRIGHTENED ONE.—They could not imprison you for simple trespass; in order to do that they would require to prove that you had been guilty of malicious mischief in some form.

P. T.—A publican is not bound to serve a customer, even if sober, but if the person is injured in any way by the refusal, he can take proceedings to recover damages.

CLEMENT.—Government Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broad-way, London, S.W.; and we prefer that you should get information there; the district you inquire about is a new one.

WALTER.—If your father has any reasonable opening in business for you, you had better try to fill it, and keep music for recreation instead of the serious business of life.

COLIN.—The Caspian Sea is the largest enclosed body of water in the world. It varies between seven hundred and forty miles in length and two hundred miles in breadth.

RACHEL.—After having accepted his invitation to accompany him to the ball, and then to deliberately attend it with another escort, was an evidence of very poor breeding.

C. S.—The mummies of Egyptian monarchs prove that few of them were over five feet high, or about the average measurement of our women nowadays, and full six inches less than the average of our men.

PHILIP.—Cesar's Camp on Wimbledon Common may be either the site of a Roman camp and cattle enclosure, a Roman encampment, or the stronghold of some Saxon or Danish chieftain.

INQUIRITIVE.—Blankets took their name from one Theodore Blanquet, who established the first manufactory for this comfortable article at Bristol, England, about the year 1840.

DOLLIE.—Millinery and dressmaking are well-rewarded trades, and every girl should receive some instruction in these arts, as well as in housekeeping and cooking to fit her for the head of a household.

OLD READER.—The contribution of a son towards the maintenance of parents chargeable to the parish is a matter for the magistrates, who fix it in accordance with the means and circumstances of the person proceeded against.

REBECCA.—Damp the spot, rub soap on, then sprinkle powdered oxalic acid (from chemist) on the spot and lay out to bleach; after some hours wash off; if the blemish is not quite removed repeat the process; mildew is difficult to get rid of.

ARTHUR.—The length of time required to learn shorthand depends upon the industry and aptitude of the student. A pretty good knowledge of the art can be acquired in six months, but only practice gives readiness.

ETHEL.—Damp the inkstain, then rub tartaric acid into it; let alone for a time, then wash off; if blackness is not quite removed repeat process; finally wash with a little oxalic acid (pennyworth from chemist) to remove the brownness the tartaric acid does not lift.

BONNY BESS.—The man usually goes first if there is only room for walking single file, but, as a rule, the ladies are wide enough for two to walk. It is considered good form not to take a gentleman's arm indoors unless for dancing or promenade.

RICHARD.—A letter or note of introduction might, of course, be written upon a visiting-card. The precise nature of the acquaintance would determine whether or not it would be proper to do so. As a rule, it certainly would not be in good taste.

ANNIE.—A usual method is to remove the tarnished appearance by rubbing over the surface with a solution of oxalic acid, and when you get the surface bright wash off the acid with pure water. Rub dry and polish with dry whiting and soft leather.

W. T.—The origin of the halfpenny and farthing was in the time of William the Conqueror. When he began to reign, the penny was cast with a deep cross, so that it might be broken in half as a halfpenny, or in quarters for four things, or farthings, as we now call them.

R. O.—Pedestrians have no right in law to stand in the way of any vehicle on the centre roadway; they must, of course, be allowed to pass from the pavement to the other side of street, or to a carriage which has halted to receive them, but not to stand in a crowd upon the centre roadway waiting for a carriage.

MISERABLE MOLLY.—Neither your parents or brothers or sisters have the right to say that you shall not enjoy the privileges usually accorded to reputable young women and girls. If you cannot get along with your family and have young company, why not try to get something to do elsewhere?

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—Only thing you can do with the skin now is to damp it sufficiently to take the stiffness out, then when it is almost dry to take it in your two hands, furside up over the back of a chair or edge of a board, and see-saw it vigorously till it is dry; it will then be and remain limp.

BELLE.—You are too sensitive in regard to the comments made upon your style of dress. So long as it is harmony with the prevailing mode and not at all ostentatious, you can treat with indifference the comments made upon it by envious observers. As you make your own dresses and do not go beyond your means in procuring the material for them, you have the right to assert yourself in the most becoming manner.

L. T.—To clean ostrich feathers cut some white and soap in small pieces, pour boiling water over them, and add a little pearlash. When the soap is dissolved, and the mixture cool enough for the hand to bear, plunge the feathers into it and draw them through the hand until the dirt appears entirely squeezed out of them. Then pass them through a clean lather with some blue to give them a good colour. Beat them against the hand to shake off the water, and dry by shaking them near a fire. When thoroughly dry, curl each fibre separately with a blunt knife or ivory paper-holder.

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ALL LETTERS to be Addressed to the Editor of THE LONDON READER, 334, Strand, W.C.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by G. F. CORNFORD; and printed by WOODFALL and KIMBER, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.

